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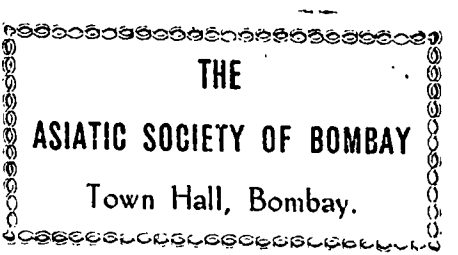

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SEETA.

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BY

MEADOWS TAYLOR,

C.S.I. M.R.I.A. M.R.A.S. &c.

AUTHOR OF 'CONFESSIONS OF A THUG' 'TARA' 'RALPH DARNELL' &c.

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'Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
* * * * * *
If this be error, and upon me prov'd,
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd.'

SHAKESPEARE, *Sonnet CXVI.*

Kx-t-22

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SEETA.

PART THE THIRD—(continued).

CHAPTER I.

'PREPARATION.'

As the morning broke, there was necessarily much excitement at Noorpoor. The whole station was full of rumour and anxiety. The Sepoys of the regiments collected on their parade grounds in groups, but were without arms; enquiring from their officers what had taken place in the night, as several men had been found with severe sabre cuts, lying near the lines, who had been carried to the hospital, but refused to tell what had happened to them. Many, no doubt, knew well enough, for the assembly which heard Azráel Pandé's address, contained both Sepoys and non-

commissioned officers: and there was much speculation among the loyal, whether there had not been a fight among the Sepoys themselves. For the present, however, the groups dispersed quietly; but with the conviction that whatever had occurred, would eventually transpire.

Very early too, Mr. Noble, to whom the police had reported the fact of a conflict having taken place at the ruined Temple in the night, took a body of them, and proceeded to the spot. A few people had collected there, and among them some Sepoys in undress; but the dead had not been disturbed, and were easily recognised. Inside the broken wall were three, killed by gun-shots; outside four, with fearful sabre cuts and spear wounds. Three were Sepoys, whose names were given by those present; and one of the dead was a noble young fellow of the Grenadier Company of the —— Regiment, by name Isree Tewáree. 'Ah!' said one of the Sepoys, 'he was always threatening, and saying he would kill the English, but he used to smoke so much "Gánja" that we thought him mad. He has only got what he deserved.' There were also two of the district police without uniform, one Mahomedan scribe in the Commissioner's department, on whose body a number of Persian letters were found, with

'Akhbars' of the Nawab's proceedings; and there was a man whom no one knew, armed with sword and shield, who was pronounced to be one of the Nawab's retainers, or a villager from without. Mr. Noble assembled an inquest on the spot, which recorded a verdict, 'That the seven persons deceased had come to their death by violence, the cause of which was unknown.' Mr. Noble then went to the homes of the policemen and the scribe, and searched them for papers; and in the latter was found a goodly bundle of the Nawab's letters and Akhbars, and drafts of communications to him, the latter proving, when afterwards read, of a very treasonable character. The writer of them had, however, gone to his account.

With all these documents, and what little information he had picked up, Mr. Noble came to Mr. Brandon and made his report, hearing in his turn what I have already recorded. Then Baba Sahib arrived, and heard the same; and another Persian scribe was sent for to examine the news writer's papers, and a sad disclosure of treachery and falsehood they proved to be. The draft of the celebrated letter about Seeta, too, was there, much interlined and altered, as if the writer had taken special pains with its composition, which indeed he had.

Soon after, Mr. Mostyn walked in from his garden to take his early tea, and the party was joined by the Brigadier and Captain Hill, who had been to the Temple to see the dead: so all the chief authorities of the place were assembled to discuss the events of the night; of course Mr. Noble grumbled good-humouredly at not having been allowed the chance Cyril had had; and more especially as he was in charge of the civil duty at the station: but Mr. Brandon satisfied him by saying, as was only the truth, 'that he had had no time to make arrangements, and that if the police had been employed, most likely no discovery of the latent treason would have been made.' As an emergent case, therefore, he had managed it after his own fashion.

'And right well, too,' said the Brigadier; 'I never heard of a thing of the kind better done. But you are an old hand now, Brandon, after your adventure at Shah Gunje. And that ruffian escaped you again after all?'

'He did,' said Cyril, 'as far as I know; but if ever I covered anything dead in my life it was his head; and he was not much more than ten paces from me, I think. Perhaps the people with him carried him away; but we shall hear of him, I dare say. I shall write to the Nawab to give

him up to justice, but I have not the slightest idea that he will be sent in.'

'Nor have I,' remarked the Brigadier; 'and there is nothing I should like better than to march the brigade to Futtehpoor, and ask for him; but in the present doubtful condition of the Sepoys, I dare not trust the men.'

'Have you, then, had any greater suspicions than usual?' asked Mr. Mostyn.

'I have, and I have not, Judge,' he replied; 'I have no fault to find with the men hitherto; but yesterday we heard some unpleasant reports of nightly meetings, though neither I nor the commanding officers could trace them. One thing, however, I am determined upon, Brandon, as I have said all along: to run no risk. I shall move all the Europeans into the fort this evening, for there is only a sergeant's guard there at present; and I shall not bring them out again till all this storm of mutiny is over, and I think you had better send all the treasure you have in also. I have some already; but much of your revenue has come in lately, I know, and you must have a good deal more now. Think what a temptation it must be for the Sepoys, if they are untrue, with only themselves to guard it!'

'Certainly,' said Cyril. 'Baba Sahib will see to it directly.'

'And the Colonel Sahib can perhaps send the European soldiers to take it away as they go to the fort,' added the Serishtadár; 'it can go in the tumbrils.'

'Not a bad idea, Baba Sahib; and Captain Hill will come and see it all done,' said the Brigadier to him. 'And now, gentlemen,' he continued, 'shall we take up the affair of last night? I must have Courts of enquiry upon the dead and wounded men; but the rest, as the Temple is out of the cantonment boundary, remains with the civil power. Your evidence, Brandon, will, however, be wanted. Will you come to the mess-house at eleven o'clock—I shall be there myself?' And Cyril said he would go with pleasure.

'As to the ladies,' continued the Brigadier, 'I cannot take upon myself to speak: but if we are all prepared, as we shall be, and a patrol of officers goes round the station every night, I think they need not fear, and I know how disagreeable it would be for them to leave their comfortable houses in this weather. But I shall make known to all, that whoever may come shall receive the quarters that have already been allotted. I don't

wish, indeed, that any may have to go into them, but it is as well to leave the point open.'

So it was all settled: and Captain Hill rode with a company of English soldiers in the evening to the treasury, where the bags of rupees were loaded upon tumbrils, and carried off, leaving only enough for daily use. It was in vain that the native officer and Sepoys of the treasury guard protested that their honour was at stake in the removal: Captain Hill could only say it was the Commissioner Sahib's order, and must be obeyed, and at sunset the English bugles rang out cheerily from the high cavalier of the old Pathán fort.

Several ladies followed the English detachment; among them Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Jones, but by far the majority remained at their houses. They were not yet afraid, and pretty Lucy Home was becoming quite a heroine. As to the Mostyns, and Cyril Brandon, their houses were quite close to the fort, and were covered by its guns, and the road to the postern on the lake passed the end of their gardens; they could escape easily, therefore, at any time, in case there should be alarm in the lines or the town, and they remained as they were.

It was really surprising to see what had been done in the fort by the Brigadier and the officers. Some of the old guns which had lain on the ram-

parts and bastions since the last Mahratta struggle, were cleaned and examined, and found worthy of carriages. The parapets and loopholed curtains of the fort were repaired; the rough road up to the gate levelled; the ditch and the interior cleansed out, and the counterscarp mended. Every building was nicely whitewashed, and new earthen floors laid down. In short, the interior, which could have accommodated a thousand men, looked, as it really was, secure and comfortable.

The fort had been built on a natural elevation, which sloped steeply towards the lake. On each side was a broad dry ditch, with a counterscarp and short glacis, beyond which the natural ground had been scarped to a height of from ten to twenty feet. There was a fausse-braie all round, which at the entrance gate was double, with large bastions and traverses, and a double dry ditch. The whole formed a height, especially where the citadel stood, which overlooked everything for miles around, and the air was therefore cooler and fresher than in cantonments, and the men liked it extremely. A church even had been arranged in one of the large empty palaces, and a hospital also; so all was complete.

As to Cyril and Seeta, if they pleased they could go to the postern, or water-gate, in their boat, or

they could walk; and once there, a path led to the tower, which Cyril had selected as the most private. Close to it were a series of chambers formed by arches in the curtain, and these Cyril had had partly closed up. One was made into a new oratory, one into a kitchen, one into a bath-room, and in another the old Brahmin and his wife, who had refused to leave Seeta, were to take up their abode. A store of flour and other provisions was laid in, and some simple articles of furniture were put into the octagon pavilion room—a low camp bed, two or three easy and other chairs, a table, and some bookshelves—and when arranged and Cyril's pictures hung up, the place looked really pretty.

As has been said, it was an octagon, corresponding with the shape of the bastion. In front, the centre division had a small oriel window and balcony, and on each side were two open niches, into which rough window panes and glass had been fitted. The style of the room was Pathán Gothic, very elegantly conceived, for the groins and mouldings of the arches were led up into the centre of the ceiling, where they met in a carved top or crown, and the ceiling was in the same curve as the pointed arches. From the windows the view was really lovely. At foot, the lake, bounded by its dam at the further end, nearly a mile distant.

On one side the native city, and several ghâts, or bathing places, with flights of steps which entered the water, and were constantly occupied by bathers and water-carriers. Opposite to it were some English bungalows and their pretty gardens; the Brigadier's occupying the highest point, where the flagstaff stood, and the red ensign of England fluttered and waved against the far blue distance. From the roof of the tower, on which was a gun, the Sepoy lines and parade ground could be seen, as well as much of the distant rolling country; but the mass of the citadel, of which the tower formed an outwork, obstructed the view in other directions. For himself, Cyril had contrived a kitchen and bath-room out of similar arches to Seeta's; but the mass of the bastion lay between them, and they did not interfere with each other. It may be supposed, therefore, that these quarters were both secluded and comfortable, and Seeta and her husband often visited them, speculating whether they would ever be needed, and looking out on the gorgeous sunset when the glory of the evening clouds was reflected in the lake, and the distance was filled with glowing golden haze.

And they were very happy; Grace and Seeta had become fast friends, and Seeta could now speak with her on ordinary matters with apparent

fluency, which seemed daily increasing. Grace often heard Seeta her English lessons, and made her read; and the evening music was always a delicious treat to her, especially when Captain Hobson came, and their voices blended in the fine trios and quartetts of well-known Italian operas. 'Guai, se le sfugge un moto,' from 'Lucrezia Borgia,' was almost her especial favorite, when the rich bass of Captain Hobson, and Cyril's fine tenor, mingled with the plaintive wail of Grace Mostyn; and indeed there were many others. Very often, too, good Mrs. Pratt came and sat with them, cheering all by her resignation, and truly pious trust in God's great mercy, and engaging Seeta sometimes, though not often, in religious discussion, for she felt how deeply the girl venerated the words of Him, which even children can understand and believe. But nevertheless, she found Seeta so strong in her own conviction of the purity of the old Hindoo Vedic belief, in which Wamun Bhut had instructed her, and so opposed in her faith to the practice of popular or ordinary Hindoo idolatry, that the good lady well knew it would be no easy task to sap the foundation of Seeta's religious citadel, or to break up her metaphysical convictions: and very advisedly she did not press the subject. 'There is good seed sown,

my dear,' she said to Grace, one day, 'and it must germinate and grow: and I shall be much mistaken if it does not. I am no match for her in metaphysics.'

In ordinary matters of business at Noorpoor there was no change. The Judge attended his court, and Cyril Brandon his Kucherry. The Sepoys were steady, duties went on as usual, and the excitement of the affair at the Temple had apparently passed away. If there had been, or were still, treasonable characters at work, they were more reticent and careful than they had been. There was only an occasional post, or letter, from the scene of tumult at Dehly; but the news that came was in all respects most fearful, and by the end of May there was no longer doubt that the treason was as widespread, as it was for the time becoming successful.

Mr. Brandon had written civilly, but strongly to the Nawab, in regard to the immediate delivery of Azráel Pandé, a convicted felon, against whom sentence of death was recorded, who had escaped, and assisted to stir up the army to mutiny, and whom he himself had heard deliver an exciting and treasonable address at the Temple near the station. He was warned that his own character was in the last degree suspicious, and that if

he persevered in it his eventual ruin must follow.

The Nawab did not immediately reply to this letter. He sent a profusely complimentary message by his moonshee, to the effect that he was devoted to the English, and that his own life depended upon their favour and protection, and that he would write as soon as possible. The fact was, that his counsellor the Moulvee, was absent on a mission from the Nawab to Hurpál Singh, the object of which was to induce the Rajah to forget old grievances, and unite with him in the common cause against the English: and when the Moulvee returned, not at all well pleased at his reception by the burly Rajah, the Nawab showed him the letter he had received, and asked his advice. 'We must temporize, my friend,' said the Moulvee; 'we are not ready to act, and the Sepoys at Noorpoor are not with us yet. I will draft a reply which will satisfy the Feringee for the present;' and he wrote as follows, in Persian, which I translate:

'To the exalted in rank, the illustrious in station, the kind to his friends, the just of the world, the refuge of the poor, Cyril Brandon, Sahib Bahadoor, Commissioner of Noorpoor, salutation and the peace of the Almighty!

'Praise be to the Lord, and thanks a thousand, that my lord has condescended to write to his humble friend a kind, monitory letter.

'The forefathers of this suppliant were men of war, and faithfully served the Koompani Bahadoor in many wars and troubled times: therefore this suppliant, who is no warrior, and desires peace and good-will, enjoys what they gained, and is grateful. Hitherto, his face has shone with the brilliancy of truth: and please the Lord, it will not now be blackened by the malevolence of evil speakers and slanderers.

'Your friend observes with sorrow, that he is accused of sheltering Azráel Pandé, the Dacoit, and devilish misleader of men: and that his sincerity is also doubted. Well, so it is the lot of many virtuous in life to be misunderstood, and this suppliant cannot avoid his fate; he is helpless before its decree!

"The decrees of the All-wise are wonderful and mystorious.
By whom can they be resisted? True suffering is silent.'

'Certain it is, that some days after the disturbance at the Temple, your suppliant heard that a Jogee had been killed by a gun-shot, and that he was carried away and burned directly; so there is no trace of him. If he should have been Azráel Pandé, your friend will rejoice that that evil man is dead.

'What more can I write? May the Lord keep you in safety, and may your honour and prosperity increase daily for a hundred years!'

'There, I think that will do for the hog,' said the Moulvee. 'It will throw him off the scent; and may his grave be defiled by dogs when he dies.'

'Ul-humd-ul-Illa!' cried the Nawab, 'it is a wonderful and learned letter: by all means let it go;' and it was written by the moonshee on gilt paper, and duly transmitted by a horseman.

'I wonder if Azráel Pandé *is* dead,' asked Philip Mostyn, as the friends read the letter between them, for the Judge was the better Persian scholar of the two; 'you covered him, you said, when you fired at him.

'No more dead than I am,' said Cyril, 'or Buldeo would have found out. Perhaps he is wounded, however; but my spy has been gone some days, and until he returns we shall not know. I think I hit him, Philip. I think I did, and hard, too.'

CHAPTER II.

SCOTCHED, BUT NOT KILLED.

In a small obscure village of the Nawab's estate, named Ryna, Azráel Pandé, wounded terribly in the face, was, as it seemed, nigh unto death. His gaunt figure was stretched on a rude pallet, and a coarse dirty sheet, stained with black patches of dried blood, was thrown over him, through which the hard outlines of his naked body could be traced. The place he lay in was the only room of a small house belonging to a retainer of the Nawab's, who had been one of Azráel's gang, in former times, and to whom the Dacoit leader had been sent, for concealment and security, on his arrival from the scene at the Temple. Cyril Brandon had not been mistaken in his supposition that he had covered Azráel with his pistol, when he fired: for the ball had struck him in the right jaw, shattering it, and fearfully mutilating his cheek; a few inches lower, indeed, and the ruffian would have been laid dead with the others we know of:

but he had escaped. Supported by some of the Nawab's retainers, who had accompanied him, they had avoided the attack of the Rahtores, and hastily placing the wounded man in a rough black blanket, which one of them carried, had borne him off rapidly in the direction of Futtehpoor. What to do with him when they arrived there, they knew not, for his former place of concealment was unknown to them; but one of the men went privily to the Nawab, who at once decided that it would be impossible to receive him, and forthwith despatched him to the village where he now was, and directed his servant, for so he supposed Foorsut to be, to follow.

Azmiel Pandé had arrived in miserable plight indeed; and it was wonderful how he had survived the journey. As a Brahmin, he could not take water from the people who carried him; here and there a village Brahmin was found, who held water to his lips, but the wound had swelled fearfully, and at his shocking appearance several of those who had endeavoured to help him fled, when the handkerchief that had been thrown over it was removed. He had, however, reached the village alive, and Foorsut had summoned the local barber to dress the wound; but he, too, had refused on looking at it, declaring the man must

die. Towards afternoon, a Mahomedan surgeon, in the Nawab's employ, arrived, who extracted the ball, or what remained of it, removed some pieces of bone and teeth, and bound up the wound, feeling assured that when inflammation set in the man must die; and as he reported this to the Nawab, on his return. I think it would have better pleased that nobleman if the worthy doctor had brought news that his patient was dead.

But Azráel lived. His spare, muscular frame, his abstemious habits of food, and his grim tenacity of life, had so far preserved him; but he was in sore plight indeed, and in agony from the pain of the wound, which even his iron endurance could not bear. In the outset he had been insensible. Soon after he had been taken up he had fainted from the shock of the wound and loss of blood, and throughout the day he was only aware that he continued to be carried onwards, though whither he knew not, and could not ask. At Futtehpoor he had revived a little, and had made gestures to be deposited there; but the Nawab's orders were positive, new bearers and a new escort had been provided, and thus he went on from village to village—helpless, and only occasionally conscious.

Some days had elapsed, and the barber, taking

courage, and assisted by a friend from the next village, had opened the bandages, and had cleansed the wound and applied simples to it with good effect. Still their patient was often delirious, and raved till it was fearful to listen to him; and once he had torn off all the dressings, when the bleeding had burst out again, and they thought he must die, but death did not terminate his sufferings.

After some days' search, Buldeo, who had gone round all the old places of concealment in hope of finding his brother, but in vain, discovered him at last in the village where Azráel lay, and heard, not without surprise, of his condition. 'He is quite insensible,' said Foorsút; 'now and then he opens his eyes, and a Brahmin woman comes and feeds him like a child; yet he can speak sometimes, though I am frightened at night at what he says, and when the devils that he calls come about him he screams, and is convulsed, till I can hardly hold him. Come and watch with me to-night, and you will see.'

'He would know me,' said Buldeo.

'If he did, he could not hurt you,' replied his brother, 'and he is too mad to know anybody but me; all he wants is "Gánja," "Gánja," perpetually, and somehow or other he contrives to smoke,

but it is as if a dead man held the hookah, and I get frightened by myself.'

'Well, I am not frightened of him, brother,' returned Buldeo, 'and you and I have seen too many dead folk in our time to be terrified by a live man who looks like one of them. Yes, I will come, but are there none of our old people near?'

'No,' said Foorsut. 'Bussunt, in whose house he lies, has gone to Futtehpoor for to-day; his women departed at once to another village, and, except for the Brahmins who come, I am alone. Do not fail me for once.'

Buldeo did not fail his brother; and, as night fell, he entered the room and sat down in a dark corner. In a niche of the wall, near the head of the pallet, a small lamp with two wicks was burning, and a brass cruse of oil stood by it; the light, therefore, fell from one side upon Azráel's face, which was terrible to see. The bandages about his jaw and cheek were blood-stained and dirty, and where the wound was, the side of his face seemed to have fallen in. The heavy, rugged, grey eyebrows hung over eyes that were deep sunk in their sockets, causing the high cheek bone of the left side, and the aquiline nose, to be more prominent than before. His colour was a deep ashy

grey—livid and ghastly. The bony throat and grizzled chest were bare, and one long sinewy arm was thrown across it over the sheet, with the wasted hand clutching the other in the paroxysms of pain when his features were convulsed.

They watched long, but Azráel did not speak. Occasionally a muttering sound escaped his lips, and deep moans, when he was in pain; but he was apparently asleep, or at least unconscious, and Buldeo watched him with an intense fascination, which he could not repress.

'It would be good to strangle him,' he whispered coolly to his brother; 'we could take his head to Mr. Braddon!'

'I have often thought of that,' returned Foorsut, 'but I have no certificate from the Judge like you; and if the English didn't hang me, they would send me over the black water, or make a weaver of me at Jubbulpoor. No, if he does live, it is his fate. And there is another thing, too: he has been reading the "Gurúra Poorún," and performing those Shaktee ceremonies, the most secret and terrible, which it almost kills one to think of. So he belongs to "Kalee Mata" now, and we dare not touch him. She will take him when she chooses; and that is why he has lived. Anyone else must have died, but he won't die this time.'

'Yes, that quite alters the matter, brother, so we must wait the "Mother's" pleasure,' said Buldeo resignedly. 'But look! Is he waking?'

Foorsut rose and went to the door, looking up to the sky, which was heavy with electric clouds. 'Yes, he will wake soon now,' he said; 'it is near midnight, and Azráel is growing restless and convulsed. Don't be frightened if he sits up. But help me if he is violent.'

Almost as he spoke the frightful figure arose in the bed to a sitting posture, and opened its great eyes with a glassy, vacant stare, looking around slowly. They evidently saw nothing; but the lips were moving rapidly, and the features were working with passion or with pain. Azráel appeared as if in some hideous dream, and for some moments he did not speak. Suddenly the features seemed to relax, and the hard staring eyes to fill with tears, while the lids closed over them, and the gaunt, sinewy arms were stretched out. 'Seeta! Seeta!' he murmured. Buldeo could hear the name perfectly. 'Seeta! Seeta! O beloved, come to me! O beloved, give me thy love, as thou hast mine! O lotos feet; I hear the sound of thy softly tinkling anklets! O lithe and swaying form advancing with dainty steps, I would embrace thee! O sweet Chumpa blossom,

thy luscious perfume reaches me! I live, I drink it in! Seeta, I die! Come, touch me and this agony will cease. Seeta, listen; a Brahmin calls thee. Come! come! . . . No heaven of Indra's is more blissful to the nymphs than mine will be for thee!'

'Ah, witch, sorceress!' he now shrieked, 'polluted as thou art, come to me! Seeta, dost thou not hear? Whither wouldst thou fly? Harlot! I will defile thee! I will crush thee! Thou shalt be my slave; and thy paramour Brandon shall not save thee from Azráel Pandó!

'Seeta, come, I will forget all. Ha! wilt thou fly from me? Nay, then I will pursue thee. Stay! . . .'

'Now seize him, brother,' said Foorsut, 'and hold him down. Once he got out to run after "Seeta," and had well nigh strangled me. He is always worst when he dreams of her.'

Buldeo had heard the raving, and shuddered as he heard it. Then this ruffian loved his young mistress, for whom he would die; and she must be protected. Only from dread of Kalee, Azráel Pandó had been strangled that night. Now Buldeo flew to his brother's aid, and between them they held down the struggling convulsed figure. Presently it was still; and Azráel woke and said, 'Foorsut!'

'There is your hookah, Maharaj,' was the reply. 'Take a few pulls at it, and you will sleep again; the Gánja will do you good.'

While Buldeo supported him, Azráel inhaled the fierce intoxication of the hemp leaves in rapid whiffs, swallowing the smoke, or passing it through his nose. At last he dropped the hookah and fell back on his bed, snoring heavily.

'Now the devils will soon come to him, brother,' said Foorsut. 'Don't be frightened; they never do me any harm, but they plague him, I think, asking for blood. This is what happens every night and mostly all day; and those who have to watch for me run out frightened. Listen! it is beginning; that's how he calls them.'

'Om! Om! Om!
Praise to thee,
O Bhugwati!
Divine Chamunda,
Dwelling among graves.
Bearing a skull,
Borne on a car,
Drawn by Spirits,
O Kala-rátri!
Mother of black night;
Large-mouthed,
Many-armed,
Sounding thy bell,
Sounding thy drum,
Loudly gnashing

Thy bloody teeth;
Clothed in skins,
And thy body
Full of blood.
Lapping it,
Lapping it,
With thy tongue.
Praise to thee,
Divine Kalee,
O praise to thee!'

He seemed to pause for awhile, and was much convulsed; but the incantation, for so it seemed to be, was resumed in the same low muttering sound as before.

'O thou that delightest
In flesh and blood,
Be propitious!
Be propitious!
Quickly accomplish
Our desires.
Enter here.
Enter, enter!
Tread, tread!
Dance, dance!
Why delayest
Thou to enter?
By thy necklace of beads,
Dripping blood,
By thy necklace of skulls
And its serpent brood,
Enter, enter!
Tear, tear!
Slay, slay!
O victory to thee,
Mother of life!

Hrrám! Hrrám! Hrrám!
Pierce, pierce,
With thy trident
Reeking with blood!
Kill, kill,
With thy thunder!
Strike, strike,
With thine axe! . . .'[1]

Then the words became indistinct and blurred, and seemed to mingle strangely with the low muttering of distant thunder in the sky. For the night had been hot and still; sheet-lightning was playing among the clouds, and now and again flashed with a blue glare into the room.

'I don't like him,' said Buldeo; 'he is a devil, and was never a man. I have heard him say all that before when he used to be at his worship. That "Hrrám! Hrrám! Hrrám!" it is terrible. "Hrrám! Hrrám! Hrrám!" it rings in my ears as if it were the tramp of a legion of devils with iron feet. Ugh! I have a mind, brother, to go out and leave thee. The thunder and the rain are better than that fearful "Hrrám! Hrrám! Hrrám!"'

'By our mother's head, do not leave me,' implored Foosut, joining his hands. 'Leave me not till this is past! To-morrow Bussunt will be back, and I don't care then. Listen! he is speak-

[1] From Sir W. Jones's translation of the 'Gurúra Poorán'

ing again. I will give him what he wants, and he held the Gánja pipe to Azrácl's lips, and after a few rapid inhalations his voice seemed to come clear and full, though the words were sometimes indistinct. A scene from the drama of 'Málati and Máhdáva' had come to his dreams, which, when they could follow it, ran thus: 'He speaks for Kalee Mata,' said Foorsut, shivering with fear. 'Listen, she is here!'

'Upon my flight,
Horrific honours wait. The hollow skulls
That low descending on my neck depend,
Emit fierce music, as they clash together,
Or strike the trembling plates that gird my loins.
Loose stream on every side my woven locks
In lengthening braids. Upon my ponderous staff
The string of bells light waving to and fro,
Jangles incessantly. My banner floats
Upborne upon the swelling breeze, whose tone
Is deepened by the echoes it awakes
Amidst the caverns of each fleshless skull,
That hangs in dread array about my person.'

Then there was a pause of stillest silence, save for the low muttering of the thunder without, and the heavy pattering of large raindrops.

After awhile the scene was resumed:—

'Now wake the terrors of the place, beset
With crowding and malignant fiends; the flames
From funeral pyres scarce lend their sullen light,
Clogged with their fleshly prey, to dissipate

> The fearful gloom that hems them round. Pale ghosts
> Sport with foul goblins; and their dissonant mirth,
> In shrill respondent shrieks, is echoed round.
> Demons of ill, and disembodied spirits
> Who haunt this spot, I bring you flesh! . . .
> Strange forms like foxes flit along the sky . . .
> And now I see the goblin host.'[1]

'Mother! Mother!' he shrieked, with his arms outstretched and quivering, and his eyes staring into vacancy. 'Thou art present! I see thee! I worship thee. I adore thee! Listen to thy slave. Take them; kill, slay thine enemies; drink, drink their blood—the blood of the English. Ah! it is sweet for thee, Mother divine. Spare not one. Let them die, women, and children at the breast! Azráel sends them, hundreds—aye, thousands, to thee—as he swore he would. And, O Mother! slay, slay. Be drunk with blood! let it redden Ganga Mata's white breast, and thou wilt rejoice! Take the witch, plunge her into hell! Seeta! O Seeta!' he cried more fiercely, 'would I could kill thee for the Mother. Seeta! O Seeta!' he continued, resuming the old tender voice, 'if thou wouldst love me and come to me, thou shouldst live a queen!' Then his hands dropped, and he threw himself back exhausted.

[1] From H. H. Wilson's translation.

'He will be quiet now, and shall have no more Gánja,' said Foorsut. 'Yet stay; he has risen again and is pointing at you. He sees you; go!'

'False-hearted villain and traitor,' cried Azráel, 'hast thou come to mock me?'

But Buldeo heard no more. He slunk out of the room and crouched outside beside the door. Then he heard his brother protesting that it was a dream, and that Buldeo was far away with the English. And Azráel spoke no more. He had sunk into his old lethargy, from which even the rising storm, the fierce blaze of incessant lightning, and the crashes of thunder, did not arouse him.

CHAPTER III.

AN OMINOUS VISIT.

WHILE the rain was yet falling heavily, for the monsoon had almost commenced, and the dawning light of morning enabled him to see the path, Buldeo left his brother, and made the best of his way to Noorpoor. 'Azráel will be more savage than ever, when he recovers,' he thought; 'and we must watch him more narrowly; but it would be well, I think, if Mr. Brandon tried to capture him as he is, and that they hanged him at once; that would prevent mischief.' And full of this scheme Buldeo hastened on, and on his arrival at Noorpoor presented himself to that gentleman after his usual fashion, and accounted for his absence by relating what he had seen, and the fearful night he had passed with the raving man.

'Hrrám! Hrrám! Hrrám! I shall never forget the shouts and the screams of that devil when the other devils came to him,' said Buldeo; 'we didn't see them, but Foorsut said they often came; and

when the lightning played about the room, and there was a smell of sulphur in the air, I could have sworn they were present; and the "Hrrám! Hrrám! Hrrám!" went on, till I ran outside. And then, sir,' he continued in a whisper,' 'he raved of the lady, and that was worse. I would have strangled him then, but that he is a votary of the Devee Mother's, and such we dare not touch; but you can, you must, hang him! Come yourself, with some horsemen, to-morrow night; we can easily surround the little village, and carry him off lying in his bed, as he is. There are plenty of people there to carry it.'

There was nothing Cyril Brandon would have liked better than the adventure; but he had promised in the next affair, whatever it might prove to be, to employ his assistant, Mr. Noble, and was loth to deprive him of a chance of distinguishing himself, even in so apparently trifling a service as the apprehension of a fugitive Dacoit. But in reality the importance of the capture of Azrael Pandé had become more and more pressing. The effect of his treason upon the Sepoys at Noorpoor might cause them to rise at any moment; and though the force of English soldiers in the fort assured protection to all Christians, yet any rising was to be deprecated, as well for the loss it would

cause, as for the bad effect it would produce in the country around. Cyril had also thorough dependence upon Mr. Noble's intelligence and activity, and felt assured he would do all that was possible.

Mr. Noble was delighted at the enterprise; and on hearing of it, Captain Hobson had volunteered, if he could be permitted by the Brigadier, to accompany Mr. Noble and the police with a party of his own troopers; and the Brigadier having no objection to aid the civil power, all those concerned prepared without delay for a night march to the village of Ryna, not more than twenty-four miles distant. Buldeo was provided with a stout active pony, and was told by Mr. Mostyn that he need be under no apprehension about his brother, to whom, in consideration of his fidelity and valuable services as a spy, a certificate had been granted temporarily, which he would have confirmed by the highest authorities at a future time; and Buldeo, putting the precious document to his eyes and breast, deposited it in a safe fold of his turban. Then the gentlemen concerned dined at Mr. Mostyn's, and discussed the probable issue of the adventure till it was time to leave. And the detachment of cavalry and some picked horsemen, under their native

officers, having drawn up in the road opposite to the Judge's house, all took their leave, with earnest wishes for their success—which indeed appeared inevitable—from their friends, including the ladies.

"I think we shall get him this time, little one," said Cyril to his wife, joyfully, as he returned home. "Lying wounded as he is, and with Buldeo to guide them, they cannot fail to succeed; and I hope they may, for Azrael has escaped me twice, and one might almost believe that he bears a charmed life!"

"I do not know," she replied, sadly; "my soul is ever heavy when I think of that man, and the evil he is permitted to do, and he has powerful friends now."

"They cannot protect him in this case," replied Cyril, decidedly; "and he is too weak to escape. We here shall know the day after to-morrow. So cheer up, my darling! and do not fear one who would have done you evil once, if he could, but is now helpless."

"And from whom you saved me, Cyril. Ah, that once! may it be for ever!" she said, turning away her eyes, which were full of tears at the vivid recollection of Azrael's attack at Shah

Gunje. 'I almost wish you had gone, and that I were with you.'

'What! in the mud and the rain? No, Seeta, you are better here; and Mr. Noble and the Captain can do as much as I.'

But for all their hopes, the expedition returned baffled and disappointed on the third evening; and, mud bespattered as they were, the officers told their adventures.

'We went on during the night, which was clear and cool,' said Mr. Noble, 'admirably guided by Buldeo, who led the way on his pony. He was never at fault for a moment, and avoided every village we came near, striking across fields and waste lands, and again finding the road in a marvellously expert manner; and we reached Ryna just before daylight. Then Hobson surrounded the place, which is little more than a hamlet, and I dismounted and went with two or three men, led by Buldeo, to the house where, no doubt, Azrâel Pandé had been, but we found it empty. There was the bed on which he had been lying, and a sheet stained with blood, and some dirty foul bandages scattered about—ample proof of what had been there—but Azrâel was gone. Then we searched every house, every corn-stack, every conceivable place where he might be concealed,

but to no purpose, for half the day. The people of the village were at first alarmed, and had bolted into the fields; but they soon returned, and told us that the day before yesterday a party of strange men who appeared to be Dacoits, had come with a litter, and carried away the wounded Brâhmin in the evening. None of them were known, and where they had gone, except to the eastward, none could tell; it was no business of the villagers, and no one had followed them. Then Hobson and I took some of his men, after they had eaten, and beat up several villages. Here and there the people were civil enough, and sometimes surly too; but no one knew of the litter or the Dacoits—if they were Dacoits—who came; and we returned—done! I am very very sorry,' he added; 'but really we did all we could do, and all I can say is, "better luck next time." I have got the shoot and the bandages, filthy and offensive as they are, and Buldeo swears to them. I paid for all our supplies, and brought away the receipts.'

There is nothing more provoking and misleading, perhaps, in any police experience, than the absolute, calm, impenetrable stolidity of Indian villagers, when they desire to conceal a fugitive or crime of any kind. In a purely native state,

perhaps, half a dozen of the chief men would have been laid on their backs in the blazing sun, each with a heavy stone upon his chest, or some ground chilies, mixed with ashes, would have been put in a bag and tied over their mouths; as, indeed, some of the horsemen had suggested might be done at Ryna, when the tokens of Azrael's presence had been shown to them. But Mr. Noble and Captain Hobson could resort to no such rough practical devices; and thus they did not hear, what they might otherwise have extorted—that, during the day following Buldeo's visit, an empty palankeen of the Nawab's, well escorted by twenty mounted men, and attended by the Mussulman doctor, had arrived; that Azrael Pandé, after the bearers had rested, had been carefully put into it; that the village had furnished a pony for Footsut, and all had gone off in the afternoon to Futtehpoor, where they had arrived safely, and the wounded man had been placed in the underground room, and was now assiduously and [illegible]ced skilfully attended.

"Well, we can't help ourselves this time," said Cyril. "I don't believe in the Dacoits myself, and I think we shall find out that the Nawab has taken his friend into good keeping. And how did you find the country?"

'As we went,' replied Captain Hobson, 'we knew little about it; but as we came back, matters looked queer. Every village had shut its gates, and we could see armed men on the walls and bastions. At one place, a crowd on a hill had a flag, and beat drums violently, and blew horns. Then a body of the Nawab's horse, about fifty men, with a large number of matchlock men—two or three hundred, perhaps—with flags and drums, had taken up a position and fired shots into the air. I think if we had been weaker they would soon have attacked us; but as I edged towards them they moved away, and at last the whole took to their heels and bolted. My men, and the police were mad to get at them; and, indeed, if they had fired at us, I should have made very short work of them.'

'I think my friend the Nawab Sahib is running up a long bill,' said Mr. Noble, laughing; 'perhaps he will send you a cartel of war, some of these days!'

'I wish to goodness he would, Brandon,' said Captain Hobson, 'I am sure it would be far better for all our native troops to be doing something, than to be for ever brooding over the reports that come; I should like to have that rascally Nawab brought to his senses, and Hurpál Singh too, before they do mischief.'

'I am afraid there is hardly a *casus belli* yet, Hobson, against either. Azráel's case falls short of one; and we can't prove, whatever I may suspect, that he is now at Futtehpoor,' said Mr. Brandon. 'But if there is to be a declaration of war, I shall not be sorry.'

There was no declaration of war, certainly; but the Nawáb, next day, sent an aggrieved letter, in his usual style, which I need not repeat. He complained that a party of cavalry had gone, without his permission, to his village of Ryna, done violence to the villagers, extorted a considerable sum of money, and taken and carried off large quantities of grain and forage, on pretence of searching for Azráel Pandé. They had invaded the privacy of families, and insulted the women, and deprived them of honour.

"God forbid that I should think, my friend,' continued the letter, 'that justice will not be rendered for these insults, and restoration made of the property which has been carried off; but I must state explicitly, that my honour—the honour of a noble[illegible], which has never yet been impugned—suffers from your unfounded suspicions in regard to the Dácoit, Azráel Pandé; and that any repetition of this suspicion, or any search of my villages without my authority, will cause a

diminution of my friendship, and unpleasant results to you in my complaint to high authorities. You are a young man, and inexperienced, and in this I find an excuse for your conduct.'

'Whew!' whistled the Judge, when he had read the letter, 'this is not the declaration of war which Hobson wanted, but it is uncommonly like gross impudence. You are quite justified in what you did, Cyril, under the Dacoity Act, sec. 18, of 1843.'

This remark, and much other conversation, which I need not record, occurred when Cyril had visited the Judge's house on his way to Kuchorry, but he had yet to learn the more offensive form in which the Nawab exhibited his present disposition to insult.

The Nawab had occasion to dispatch one of his favourite Mámas, or confidential women-servants of his zenana, to Noorpoor on a particular errand, but her chief mission was to Secta herself. The Máma had delivered the letter to Mr. Brandon early, and left word with the attendants at his house that she should call again for the reply, should there be any, as she returned; and when Mr. Brandon had gone to his work, and she had ascertained that he would not return till the afternoon, she had gone to

the house and asked to be allowed to wait in the garden till the answer should come. Seeta, to whom the message was brought, thinking no evil of the woman, allowed her to come: and saw the Máma, a tall, portly dame, well-dressed, and, like others of her class, with no pretensions to seclusion, walk about the garden, holding a small silver hookah in her hand, smoking as she walked, and talking in a loud voice to another woman-attendant with her, when the gardener very civilly offered her a bouquet of flowers. As the sun was hot, Seeta good-naturedly went to the door of her cottage as she passed, and asked her to come in and rest herself.

'That I will, my beauty,' said the dame; 'you live here secluded; but everyone has heard the fame of your charms, and I see now that they are not exaggerated. You do not remember me; but I was once sent by the Nawab Sahib to buy pearls from your grandfather at Shah Gunje. You were then a widow, and had a child. Is he here?'

'No,' replied Seeta, 'he is dead.' She did not now like the woman's appearance at all, nor the free manner in which she had been accosted. Máma Jumeela was not an agreeable

person to look at. She was tall and fat—unwieldy, indeed. Her features were coarse and bold; the flesh of her cheeks and double chin hung in folds to her short neck, and, on each cheek were moles, from which long bristly hairs extended, and on her upper lip was almost a strong moustache. The thick lips and teeth were blackened by the use of missee and pán, and her eyes were painted with antimony after a fashion which increased their bold, licentious appearance in a most disagreeable manner. For the rest, the Máma Sahiba wore a profusion of rich gold ornaments on her neck and her arms, and her heavy earrings had pulled down the lobes of her ears till they rested upon her huge round shoulders. Her dress was a vivid scarlet petticoat, made very full, of rich heavy mushroo, or Indian satin, and a bodice of striped yellow silk, over which was a short shirt of transparent muslin, buttoned at the throat, and falling over the band of the petticoat. Above all she wore a 'dopútta,' or scarf, of thin Benares muslin, of a brilliant light green, covered with flowers of silver tissue, and with ends and border of gold thread brocade. This was somewhat fraged, perhaps, but still remained gorgeous. All day had the dame displayed her magnifi-

cence through the bazaar of Noorpoor, sitting cross-legged in her palankeen, with the doors wide open, smoking her silver hookah, which was filled from time to time by her attendant, and receiving the salutations of all beholders. This splendour was, however, lost upon Seeta, who, with her slight, graceful figure, and her simple dress of pure white muslin, afforded as great a contrast to the Máma Sahiba as can well be imagined.

The woman seated herself on the low divan with a heavy flop and grunt, and looked round her with much contempt, feeling the cover of the seat as if to estimate its value.

'Nothing but cheap, course chintz,' she remarked, with a sneer. 'It should be satin, for a dainty one like thee to lie on. And this place is poor and mean, after all. Touba! fie! They told me he kept you in a palace. Ul-hund-ul-Illa, the Feringees have no palaces, only the Nawabs. And what is inside there?' she continued, rising from her seat.

'You cannot go in there—it is private,' said Seeta, rising also, and standing resolutely before the door of the inner bedroom.

'Private!' returned the woman, with a scornful toss of her head. 'Private! It is a new

thing to hear that goldsmith's women are private, or Feringee women either! Touba! No, my pretty bird, thou shouldst be in a better cage than this — private and honoured, with jewels to wear, and fine clothes like mine, and money to spend, and a score of women to wait on thee! And,' she whispered, with a horrid leer in her flashing eyes, 'a Nawab to love thee, one who burns at the mention of thy name. Ah, what wouldst thou not be with him, my dove?' Has he not sent thee this?' and she drew a necklace of fine pearls from her bosom.

Seeta's soft eyes now dilated and flashed defiance, and she pushed the woman's face from her with all her force. She almost gasped for breath, and could not cry out.

'Ah, that's the way with all of you, at first,' said the woman, in a wheedling tone, 'but you will come right in time. Take it, my darling, my heart, take what a kind lover sent you, and by-and-bye he will send an army for you, which shall be the retinue of their queen.'

Seeta broke away from the woman and rushed to the door, calling for help; and several of her Rahtores and the servants came running to the spot

'Take her away! take her away!' cried the girl, pointing to the Máma. 'If Mr. Brandon comes, he will kill her. Take her away!'

'What's the matter, Seeta?' said Cyril, anxiously, as he suddenly stepped from behind the shrubbery which led to the Judge's garden. 'I heard your voice ever so far off, and I ran on. Who has frightened my pet?'

'Look! she is there, Cyril,' said Seeta, trembling, and pointing to the woman, who was now advancing. 'I cannot tell you what she said, but oh, the insult and the shame of it!' and she burst into tears.

Cyril knew the woman by sight as well as by reputation. He had seen her in attendance at the tents when the Nawab gave his last party; and he immediately suspected, from Seeta's agitation, what had happened.

'Come out!' he cried, 'come out! You are a woman, else I had beaten thee. What dost thou here? Who sent thee?'

'The Nawab Sahib sent me, whose slave you and all Feringees are or will be soon,' replied the woman, defiantly. '"Beat me!" he will beat thee with his shoes when he comes with his army to take her away. Would she stay with a cowardly Englishman, a Kafir, when she

might be mistress of Futtehpoor? Never mind, my pretty one! 'Fear not, my dove, what he says to you. His days are numbered now, and thou shalt be free. I, Máma Jumeela, will come for thee, I——'

But Seeta had turned and fled into her oratory, where she lay prostrate before the altar, sobbing, as if her heart would break, 'O, that I had not been born, that he should be insulted for me!'

'Begone, devil!" cried Cyril, from between his set teeth, and lifting his hand. 'No, I will not strike thee nor touch thee. But listen. If ever thou art seen in Noorpoor again, the police will take thee, and I will have thy head shaved, thy face blackened, and send thee on an ass to thy master. Begone, lest evil happen to thee!'

'Ha! Ha! ha!' laughed the dame. 'I am not afraid, Brandon Sahib. If you live you may shave my head; but you will die, like the Feringees at Jhansy, and be sent to burn in hell. Salaam, Sahib; your slave departs!', and Máma Jumeela stalked away to her palankeen.

'My lord, my lord,' said the Rahtores and servants and chuprassies who had assembled, 'only let us blacken Máma Jumeela's face, that she may show herself to the Nawab.'

'Let her go. Do not touch her. I order you not to meddle with her. Her own shame goes with her; but if she comes again,' Mr. Brandon continued, 'I will do as I said. Let her depart,' and he turned in to seek Seeta.

Máma Jumeela did not, however, get away as easily as she thought. The servants pelted her palankeen with mud, and followed her till a crowd of urchins took up the sport, and hunted her to the place where her escort had remained without the bounds of the station, hooting and abusing her in the rich free style common to Indian gamins.

Máma Jumeela was furious, for her grand new satin petticoat was splashed with mud. As she tore her hair, she cried that her honour was gone—she would walk barefoot to Futtehpoor—she would have the life-blood of Mr. Brandon—and his wife should become a slave. And her ravings became unfit to record as she took dust from the road and threw it upon her head. But she was finally coaxed into entering the palankeen, and was carried on to Futtehpoor to tell her own version of the tale to willing ears. 'A thin, pale-faced chit, after all, like a Feringee, not worth the trouble I took for you,' she said to the Nawab. 'If you will

have one, why not take Missy Mostyn, or both, if you like, when their men are killed, like them at Jhansy?'

'Ah, yes,' echoed the Nawab, 'like them at Jhansy, and that will be soon now, Jumeela, very soon. I will give thee Brandon to spit upon; will that soothe thee? But thou shouldst not have gone to his house.'

'Before he dies—before he dies. Dil Khan! Remember thou hast promised,' cried the woman, 'while there is life in him to see me.'

Cyril found it no easy task to soothe Seeta. She had been grieved before, but never insulted, and her high spirit had thoroughly revolted at the indignity put on her husband. 'You don't know how much it means,' she said to him; 'how deep, how flagrant the insult is, my darling; but we are helpless at present to avenge it.'

'Let it pass, Seeta,' he replied. 'The Nawab is a fool, and we don't know whether that horrible woman was ordered to come to you or not. Do not mention what she said to you to Rose and Grace; it would only distress them, but you can say that the woman was insolent and threatening, and I turned her out.'

Yet it was a hard blow; and it was not till she had gone to Grace, and tears relieved her, that Seeta was herself again.

Jhansy! That dreadful woman had discharged a parting shot, which rankled in Cyril's mind. What could have happened there? He had heard nothing of late of that place. No one had mentioned it; no one had had letters, that he knew of, from Jhansy. But he had work to do, and he sat at the table in Seeta's drawing-room, as he called it, drafting official reports, while Seeta was with Grace, when an attendant announced that Baba Sahib was in the bungalow, wishing to speak with him, and he went there.

'I hear distressing news from Jhansy, sir,' said the old man, evidently much affected. 'The Twelfth, the Cavalry, and Artillery all mutinied on the 4th and joined the Ranee, and every Christian, except two or three who escaped, were put to death on the 7th or 8th. Not one survives; not one man, woman, or child! I would strongly advise you and Mr. Mostyn to go to the fort with the ladies to-night.'

'But are you certain about this? It is very terrible,' said Cyril.

'There is no doubt at all of the event,' replied Baba Sahib. 'Malchund, the banker, who has an agency there, read the letter he had received by express, and others have the same news. Every one has heard it by this time, even the Sepoys. The Nawab's salute the day before

yesterday, was for news of the "victory" at Jhansy, which he, too, received by express. No, sir, there is no doubt whatever of the news,' continued the old man, wiping his eyes. 'None, and it is said that one poor gentleman shot his wife and then himself, rather than surrender.'

And who that was in India at the time, has forgotten the thrill of horror with which a letter that gave an account of the scene was read all over India, or could restrain his tears at the narrative of the sufferings of those who escaped from Nougong? The first letter was, long afterwards, proved to be false; but the miseries endured in the flight from Nougong were not exaggerated.

'And Nougong is gone, too,' continued Baba Sahib; 'but the English officers got away, escorted by some of their men. May God keep them safely!'

'God help them, indeed! We all pray for them, Baba Sahib. But till there is a movement here we will not stir. We must do our duty at all risks.'

And so around them the trouble thickened, for the evil storm of 1914 was raging fearfully everywhere.

CHAPTER IV.

PEACEFUL DAYS INTERRUPTED.

It was strange, notwithstanding the news of mutiny and massacre everywhere around, that the native troops at Noorpoor remained as yet steady. Those who need to do so, can learn the events of the month of June, 1857, from the several histories and narratives that have already been written, and there are few, perhaps, of the readers of these pages that have not already borne them in mind. The fiercest portion of the fanatical storm of Sumbut, 1914, broke in that month on every station in the wide valley of the Ganges and Jumna; and in most of them, precious English blood had been shed in pitiless massacre. I need not call to remembrance the noble and patient, though unavailing defence of the entrenchments at Cawnpoor, and the inhuman slaughter of those who surrendered, when defence was no longer possible; nor that of other captives there which followed, under, if possible, still more miserable and terrible

circumstances, and when their rescue, under Havelock's heroic exertions, was apparently close at hand. I need not record events at Lucknow, where a few devoted men were defending themselves against tens of thousands of infuriated Sepoys and people of Oudh, with a devotion and valour which has rarely been equalled, and never surpassed. Nor how, at Dehly, that fierce strife had commenced which was to continue yet for months, while the fate of British dominion seemed to be suspended, and while, though Sepoys, regiment after regiment, in the Punjab had mutinied, one strong, resolute mind rallied loyal Sikhs about him, and dispatched men, money, and munitions of war to the scene of strife. These events, and the succours of English regiments, many of whom were now fighting their way to the upper provinces in the fierce heat and pouring rain, belong to the domain of history, not to this tale, and will be read with untiring wonder and interest for generations to come.

Now and then, stragglers from distant stations, who had escaped or survived local tumult and massacre, reached Noorpoor, and were tenderly cared for. Men who had lost wives and children, delicate women who had never in their lives known hardship, and who, too, had lost husbands and children, by musket-shot, or by exposure to

the pitiless heat and exhausting fatigue—who had tramped almost barefoot and in rags, for a hundred miles and more over stony roads, with feet blistered and bleeding—suffered extremes of hunger and thirst, and with faces scorched and swollen out of all recognition—dropped in one by one, or in small groups, telling their miserable adventures to hearty sympathisers, and thanking God that they had reached a haven of peace and security.

How many a tale of misery, such as it is hardly conceivable could be endured, we know of, or have read of: but how many more are there which will never be known, save to those who suffered them! Native feeling towards the unfortunates seemed to vary. Sometimes it was fierce and brutal, and helpless refugees were slain; again it was pitiful; and children, men, and women were sheltered in towns and villages, clothed and fed, and helped on their way: else who had escaped? The English were not all dead, nor were like to die, though men like Azrael Pandé had done their evil work, and were still doing it perseveringly. Many a native Prince and Baron was weighing the probability of English or Native ascendency, and some cast their fortunes and swords into the scale of one, and some into that of the other. We know the English cause pre-

ponderated in the end; but then it was not clear to all that it would preponderate. The men who thought it would not, deluded with false powers and hopes, had their own ends to gain, like Dil Khan; many had old feuds to renew, and territory and power to recover, like Hurpál Singh, who are but types of others situated as they were; with much at stake truly, but much to gain too, if there were no English.

Perhaps the same feeling pervaded other and lower classes, though for very different causes. Landowners, who had suffered from what they deemed oppressive settlements, and local cesses, who remembered old times, when they paid pretty much as they chose, and had the means of escaping and defying the imposts of local native officials, rejoiced at the prospect of emancipation from strict control. Suitors who had been defeated in English Courts threw English decisions to the winds, and took the law into their own hands. Bankers whose usurious dealing with the people had been checked, looked eagerly for opportunity to renew old practices of exaction, and make money in heaps. Thieves, Dacoits, and the lawless swash-buckler soldiery, who had ill-succeeded in turning their swords into ploughshares, rose in thousands, plundering the peaceful and industrious.

And yet, at the very worst, there was a strong, deep-lying attachment to English rule, to English faith and honour, and to that ample protection of property to the meanest as well as to the richest, which a powerful English Government had afforded, that pervaded all the most valuable portions of the population, and bore good fruit in time.

I need not, perhaps, record how anxious the good old banker of Shah Gunje was at this period, or how each recurring report from his agencies at Benares, Mirzapoor, and other great commercial cities in the disturbed provinces, that the English rule was doomed, that the English were perishing in every successive outbreak of mutiny, sat grievously at his heart, and admitted of no comfort. Nor were his advices from Noorpoor more consolatory. His friends there wrote, that though no outbreak had occurred, yet one must inevitably take place: that many treasonable agents were at work, and that the evil storm must burst there, as elsewhere, sooner or later. He knew it was no use, yet he wrote to Mr. Brandon and to Seeta imploring them to come to him. He did not dread the Caste Guild for her or for himself now, in comparison with their safety; and he thought if Mr. Brandon came, that the loyal in that portion of the district —and there were yet many—would rally round

him, and defy Rajah Hurpál Singh, who was far more dreaded than the Nawab. Aunt Ella, too, wrote to Seeta, bidding her to come and be safe with her; but as to the rest, I think her increasing asceticism had narrowed her mind and blunted her old loving perceptions. The incessant 'Ram! Ram! Ram!' was, if possible, more absorbing than ever, and the marks on the wall of her private room showed now some hundreds of thousands, and might soon reach to millions, and so help to effect the eternal repose of her soul after her death. It was little less than impious, she thought, that her brother was still engaged in his business, at a time, too, when great terror and confusion existed in the world; and she often besought him, even with tears, to wind up all, retire to Benares, and lead a holy life till he died. But the old man was resolved to stand by his order, and to help the English if he could; and he threw all his weight into the loyal portion of the population of Shah Gunje. Should it fall from the English, it must belong to the Nawab or to the Rajah; and in either event there was nothing to be apprehended but violence and exaction.

Mr. Brandon and Seeta duly received these letters, which had been dispatched to them by two of the banker's treasure carriers, who also bore a

considerable sum of money in gold, and bills on Noorpoor, for Seeta's use, and to help their flight if they should determine to go to him. If it had been possible to make a diversion in the Shah Gunje district, Mr. Brandon would willingly have undertaken the responsibility of it at any personal risk; but as he and Seeta anxiously discussed the subject, her intimate knowledge of her old neighbourhood left no hope that there would be any chance of present success. The persons mentioned by Narendra were certainly influential and respectable landholders and merchants; but they had neither the means nor the men to effect the desired purpose. Besides, local war had not yet broken out, and might not break out; nor did Mr. Brandon, or Mr. Mostyn, or Mr. Noble believe that it would not, for both the Nawab and the Rajah were increasing their turbulent levies with very small means of supporting them, and when these came to an end they would be obliged to let them loose upon the country.

If it had been possible to make a tour of the district with a strong military force, and to have thus overawed disaffection, Mr. Brandon, in his civil capacity, would willingly have led it; but who could venture to say what the real temper of the native soldiers was, or what their ultimate

purpose might be? No such expedition could be complete in effect without English soldiers, and if they were withdrawn, the risk of the fort of Noorpoor, where all were safe, would follow. Besides, the monsoon had opened, and promised to be a heavy one: the fair-weather roads were now deep in mud, and to pass heavy guns over them, where the lightest carts could not travel, would be impossible. On all accounts, therefore, the Noorpoor council agreed that it was most advisable to undertake nothing but measures for local safety, and these were now as complete as possible.

The officers, and such of the Christian clerks and other subordinates as were able men, took night duty as patrols; well armed, and for the most part well mounted. Arrangements were made for their reception in the fort, and for their prompt assistance in case of attack. The guns on the fort bastions covered the Sepoy lines, on which a fire of shells could be poured at any time: and they also dominated the city, in case of any treachery there. So far, therefore, as cautious foresight could provide, every possible arrangement against surprise or treachery was complete. No natives were admitted into the fort except the servants of the soldiers and officers, and two

howitzers loaded with grape, commanded the outer gate and the glacis beyond.

With the military officers, the civilians and their clerks took their regular turns of duty, and never was Seeta absent from her husband's side. Dressed in her boy's clothes, she rode her spirited mare gracefully and boldly, and to the admiration of all; and many marvelled to see the girl, apparently so jealously guarded before, throw off the restraint habitual to her countrywomen, and follow her husband in a duty which was never perhaps without danger. Of danger such as this, danger even in open fight, perhaps, so long as she was near Cyril, Seeta had no fear. In the latter she had not certainly been tried, but in the night patrol she took a strange delight. No matter what the weather was, calm or storm, fair or drenching rain, the active, hardy girl never failed, never hesitated when Cyril's turn came round, to ride with him, and to share whatever might befal.

Seeta indeed thought this a positive escape from danger; for she now dreaded the Nawab equally with her first implacable enemy, against whose dangerous designs Buldeo's warnings were constant and emphatic. Buldeo and her giant Luchmun Singh, had especially warned her against ever being alone by night. What might not a resolute,

experienced Dacoit like Azrácl Pandé contrive and execute? they said. True, he could not be discovered, but it was this very fact that gave Buldeo most uneasiness. 'He could not have travelled far in the condition I saw him,' he said to Mr. Brandon, 'and he must be at Futtehpoor, if I could only find him; but Foorsut is not to be seen, and perhaps Azrácl has discovered that he is my brother, and has destroyed him. But I have not given up my search yet, and often, when you miss me, I am there watching.' Cyril Brandon had not under-estimated either danger to Seeta; and he shared her apprehensions. At first he had proposed that she should go to Shah Gunje; but the absolute terror with which she heard the proposal, prevented any renewal of the subject. 'How could Narendra protect me?' she said; 'once he would have died, but for you; and I—— If they knew that I were gone there, is it possible that they would not carry out their designs? Ah, darling, I should never see you again if I once left you, never! And here I am safe, safe as you are. If you die, I can at least go with you into death. I could not live now without you.'

'Philip, and Rose, and Grace would take care of my pet,' he said, half in earnest, 'while trouble

lasted; and then there would be Narendra and Aunt Ella afterwards.'

'They might care for my body, if it lived,' she answered, 'but my soul would be with you, Cyril. No—my body could not live if you were gone.'

'Then you shall stay, little one,' he answered, 'and I will never teaze you again about Shah Gunje. What we have to endure shall be shared together now, come what may.'

In truth, Seeta was growing out of old ways and perceptions very rapidly. Grace Mostyn had taken this strange girl to her heart, and was making her more and more like herself. Simple-minded, Seeta always was, with all her strange lore: unselfish, and deeply pious after her fashion. She was persevering and studious, with a quick, retentive memory, and ready perception. Grace found no difficulty in teaching her, and it was a strange pleasure to her to find the new thoughts awakened in Seeta, stirring her soul to its depths with a vivid enthusiasm. She was beginning to read and understand portions of Milton and Shakespeare: and in the latter, because the action of his dramas accorded most with her old Sanscrit studies, she took a passionate delight; an almost feverish interest indeed, at times, in some of them, which Cyril was obliged to check, and which gave

him more insight into the unaccountable passages of her old life than he had ever obtained before. If he had allowed her, she would have denied herself proper food and rest in the pursuance of her exciting studies; and often Cyril had yielded to her entreaties when she could not sleep, and allowed her one of her favourite plays, or Jeremy Taylor's 'Holy Living and Dying,' which Mrs. Pratt had given her, and which had fascinated her from the first, and out of which she was fond of learning simple sentences by heart: while the 'Pilgrim's Progress' she could read in her own tongue.

'How can we keep her back, Mr. Brandon?' asked Grace one day, almost with a look of despair; 'she puts us all to shame. No sooner have I shown her any favourite passage of my own, in any book, than she hides herself somewhere, and gets it by heart. "How little do we know of you English," she said to me yesterday, "how little of your faith, or your books, teeming with glorious thoughts, and the fresh stores of knowledge that are ever opening to you. While for us —no one writes now; no one thinks; we are as the dead, with those whose very language is dead too." What could I say to her, Mr. Brandon? Will you

tell me how to teach her better, or how to check her?'

But Cyril could not. 'You are very, very kind, to teach her at all,' he said; 'or to take the trouble you do with her. I don't think you can restrain her now. She knows enough to incite her to know more, and she will persevere till she falls back on herself, and is as content with her English as she is with her Hindee and Sanscrit. But it must be dull work giving my wife such lessons?'

'No,' she replied quickly, 'I delight in it. I look to Seeta's share in my day's occupation with as great pleasure as my own. If you ask why, I will tell you.'

'I do ask why, Miss Mostyn.'

'Then it is because I come to know her heart: to see all the love, all the devotion, all the intense yearning to fit herself for your society. Much as you believe in Seeta, I do not think you know how she loves you. Now she cannot find words to express what she feels; for she says, her own tongue is too gross and too dull. "I could talk to him in it like Juliet," she said once to me, "but he would laugh at me, and I should be ashamed now, though I feel I was like Juliet once. But I should rather, far rather, be like

Imogen. She, you know, went to meet death when her husband sent Pisanio to kill her, and she would have died in her truth. Ah! dear Grace, I can never read that scene without tears. She was so true, so tender, so loving, so faithful. There is but one like her, in all our dramas—Savitri, of whom you know. She went into death for her lord, and I—I should not fear death for him." Perhaps,' continued Grace, and then broke off, smiling through her tears—'is there anything at her heart that makes her think so, Mr. Brandon, anything that I can reason or soothe her out of? Indeed I would try, for I love her now so dearly.'

Cyril's heart smote him, for he knew of the dread and the danger; but he would not tell them to Grace. 'It is only her excitable nature,' he said, 'marvellous in its intensity, and needing all our care and guidance; and I may say "ours" now, since you have a part with me. Will she not take to music? that would help to turn her thoughts from other subjects.'

'Not much,' replied Grace; 'she finds the mechanical part of learning the notes difficult: but she has a quick and correct ear, and a most delicious voice; not so high as mine, but far more full and rich—I quite envy it. She knows

more than you think of by ear, and the notes guide her; but I only teach her simple melodies like "Home, sweet Home," and "Vedrai Carino." She was singing them like a bird to-day, and entreating me not to tell you, when Rose came in and kissed her, and she began to cry, and ran away home. I could not have believed that any Hindoo girl could ever be like her.'

'There can be no doubt that there are many such who do not know their own powers,' returned Cyril, 'and have no means, like Seeta, of discovering them; and it will take years, perhaps generations, for our education to reach them! Yet, cold as it is, how earnestly the girls in our schools strive whenever they have opportunity. They quite equal the boys.'

In all this progress and discussion Mrs. Mostyn had taken but little part, for she knew that Seeta was in better, because more patient, hands than hers, and she would not interfere with what had become almost a necessity of Grace's otherwise monotonous life; and if, Rose thought, her sister could bring Seeta, in any degree, up to her own standard, it was the nearest thing to being Mr. Brandon's wife herself; all she herself had ventured upon was instruction in needlework, in which she excelled, and in which Seeta was sadly deficient.

So, after the English lessons of the day were over, and the ladies took up their work, Seeta had gradually joined them and proved an apt and diligent pupil, especially in embroidery, for which she evinced decided talent, and had worked collars and cuffs for her friends, and even some trimmings for their dresses with great delicacy.

Thus the time passed; and pleasantly now, for the first alarms had subsided, or the society at Noorpoor had become more used to look danger in the face, and so to fear it less; but before many days of July had passed, all Cyril's and Seeta's apprehensions had been re-excited.

One evening, it was Cyril's turn for patrol duty, and he had asked some friends who were to accompany him to dinner, leaving Seeta to read as usual close to one of the windows of her cottage. By day this was Seeta's favourite seat. The China roses, trained on one side, with an ever-blooming jessamine on the other, gave out a pleasant perfume and encircled the window frame like a bower; and the garden, with the sparkling waters of the lake beyond it, and the grim old fort above, where the English flag floated from the high cavalier, made up a picture she loved to look upon. Some showers had fallen during the day; but the night was clear, and the stars shone

with almost unusual lustre. She had looked at them for awhile, leaning on the low window sill, and then shut the casement and betaken herself to her favourite 'Imogen,' whose words she was teaching herself line by line, shutting her eyes as she repeated what she read.

Once she heard a rustle, as she thought, and looked up, but there was nothing; it might be the birds, who had nests in the thatch and in the creepers. Across the lawn, not far from the stables, was the guard-room, and she saw forms moving there, and the police sentinel walking up and down. From the dining-room there came the sound of cheerful voices and an almost chorus of merry laughter, in which she could distinguish her husband's voice distinctly. She smiled at her own fear and again sat down to read.

Presently she heard the rustle repeated, and, as she looked up, beheld a sight which seemed to curdle her blood. Right against the pane was the horrible countenance of the Dacoit, fearfully changed and partly bandaged up, yet never to be forgotten. The fierce eyes glared at her from their deep sockets, the grim face, ashy grey and wan, was within a foot of her own, with the light of her candles flaring upon it, and the features working savagely and threateningly as if trying

to speak. Once before she had seen a face as brutal look over a wall, and often seemed to see it still: but this was far more horrible in the intensity and malignancy of its expression. If her revolver had been within reach, she had shot at what she saw, but she had left it in the inner room with her boy's dress. She did not lose her presence of mind, but ran to the door crying for help. At that moment too the Dacoit had been seen by one of the guard, and there was a rush across the lawn, and shouts of, 'Seize him!' 'Stop him!' Buldeo was absent.

Oyzil heard his wife's cry, and the rush of the men, and with his friends started up and leaped into the garden. Many ran hither and thither confusedly. The Judge's guard was alarmed, and joined in the search, for one of the Rahtores declared he had seen a figure near the window of the cottage, and one of the police was sure it passed a shrubbery at the foot of the garden; but though the gentlemen mounted their horses and examined every road to the place, no one was to be seen. Azraël, however, had again had a narrow escape. As he heard Seeta's cry he had traversed the garden rapidly, and, under screen of the hedge and trees, had plunged into the lake,

dived among some high reeds, and sat there till the confusion was over.

Cyril at first tried to persuade Seeta that she was mistaken. She was trembling and sobbing now with her head lying on his shoulder, but she persisted in declaring she was right.

'It is cowardly,' she said at last, 'to be afraid! What could he have done to me with you so near? And we have the rounds to go, Cyril; the ride will do me good, and you would not leave me here alone? Come and see if any marks were left, for the earth is soft below the window.'

True enough, there were several marks of two long bony feet, and traces of them thr[illegible] garden to a hole in the hedge in wh[illegible] freshly broken twigs. Beyond, there was [illegible] Azráel had been alone.

Cyril did not attempt to dissuade Seeta [illegible] her project. He would not have left her [illegible] then for worlds, and he then determine[illegible] take her to the fort next day, where no D[illegible] could enter. It was evident to him that [illegible] ráel's design was to examine the cottage; [illegible] it was impossible to say when it might not [illegible] attacked in force. Before long, therefore, t[illegible] party, joined by others, was proceeding leisurely through the broad roads of the cantonment.

But the night did not pass without incidents, or so securely as its predecessors. As the patrol passed onwards, suddenly a lurid light shot up into the sky, and on turning into another road, they saw one of the officers' bungalows, not far from the lines, in flames, which increased in volume every moment. Two young men lived there together, and were now outside in their night dresses, with their revolvers in their hands, and crowds of Sepoys running to the spot with water-pots. Many were helping to remove furniture and boxes, or endeavouring to pull the blazing thatch from the roof, while two or three active young fellows had climbed up the thatch to the ridge, and were pouring water on what remained entire, which, however, nothing could save. There appeared no want of sincere goodwill in most of the men, who, when the Brigadier and their several commanders arrived, cheered them lustily with loud shouts, and Brandon also as he rode forward to meet them; and Seeta's heart bounded as she heard the ardent welcome cry of 'Brandon Sahib Bahadoor ke Jey.' But from the dusky outskirts of the crowd, which surrounded the blazing building, rose some ominous shouts of 'Deen! Deen!' and jeers at those who were assisting. Some thought the fire accidental, but

to Brandon it was clear that here, as elsewhere, active mischief had begun with Azrácl Pandé's appearance, and had left its mark behind.

No Christians slept in Noorpoor that night; all were ready dressed, men and women, waiting the signal from the fort—the first gun. But the night passed quietly, and there were drills and guard mountings as usual in the morning. No further risk, however, was to be run; and in the afternoon Mrs. Mostyn and Grace walked up to the fort, joining other ladies there, and watched Cyril and Seeta sailing on the lake till they ran their boat under the tower, and ascended by the water gate to their quarters.

CHAPTER V.

DIL KHAN'S TROUBLES.

'AND so you saw her there, Maharaj?' asked the Nawab of Azrâel Pandé, as they sat together in the room we know of, by the well; 'Yet it was a mad expedition, my friend. Suppose they had caught you?'

'They would have hanged me by the hands of the leather-dresser, and you would not have seen your friend again—that's all,' he replied gloomily, and fell into silence.

'But Seeta,' persisted the Nawab, 'how was it that she escaped you?'

'Because your people were cowards—cowards!' he hissed from between his teeth, and 'hung back when we reached the boundary marks. Had they done as they swore to do on the axe, she would have been here now; and she is there—the witch—the sorceress! It was her devilish spells that checked the men, and filled their

hearts with fear. Do I not know that? Did I not hear her reading them out of an English book, and see her? O; Seeta, I saw thee! I thought I could feel thy breath on my cheek as I listened and watched. Seeta, Seeta, thou didst not hear as I spoke, as I whispered to thee to come, and be my queen!'

'You rave, my friend,' remarked the Nawab, drily, 'and raving about a puling, wooden-faced girl like her is unseemly in an old man. While you were sick and in fear, you said what you did not know of. But, now that you are well, thanks be to the Lord, all those follies, and your devils, should pass away.'

'Ah, we do not know who come, Nawab, or you would not be here; you would be afraid to hear their "Hrrám! Hrrám! Hrrám!" Do you not hear their iron feet? Listen!'

'If you are going to call your devils, and Huree Das the goldsmith, about you, I shall go, Azrácl Pandé, and leave them with you,' and he rose to depart.

'Stay,' cried his companion, 'they are gone—you need not fear now. Yes,' he continued, with a shudder, passing his hands over his eyes, 'I see many now who never came before; and there is the old man at Gudduk with his spear wounds

gaping, and all the women dead lying about him, and—— Yes, it is all blood now—blood in my eyes, blood in my heart, blood of the English who are gone to hell at Dehly and Cawnpore and Jhansy, flowing in a great stream, and more following. Oh Mother divine! more, more, till thou art full!'

'Nay, this is worse and worse,' said Dil Khan to himself. 'I must turn him from his blood. And what of the Sepoys, Maharaj? Did you see them, as you said you would? Do you hear what I say? Never mind the devils; they will come another time, when you want them.'

'Reach me that hookah. I feel too weak to live,' returned Azrael; and as the Nawab handed it to him, he took two or three pieces of lighted charcoal from the live embers near him, put them upon the hemp leaves in the bowl, and inhaled several long breaths of smoke. 'Now I will talk to you, Nawab Sahib,' he said, more collectedly, 'but not much, for this wound hurts me still. What, did you ask me? Perhaps my mind was wandering—it often wanders now.'

'About the Sepoys,' said Dil Khan. 'I am beginning to think you are wrong about them, my friend; and if the Brigadier and Brandon —may they burn in fire!—brought them and the

"sojers" down on me with their big guns, I don't think you or I could hold this place.'

'Peace!' cried Azráel, waving his hand. 'You speak as a child. Was there not a Sahib's bungalow burnt in the lines last night; and did you not see the blaze from hence?'

'Yes, of one poor house,' replied the Nawab with a sneer. 'I expected a blaze which would have lighted up all the country round.'

'Ah, you don't know, you don't understand yet; that was only the beginning,' said Azráel. 'Was I not there, and dried my clothes over the hot ashes of the house? Did I not see Brandon and the witch Seeta on her horse with him, and the Brigadier, and all the officers? And we cried "Deen! Deen!" and jeered the men who were bringing water and trying to put out the fire.'

'Well, well, I know that,' returned the Nawab impatiently; 'and the issue of it was, that all the officers and the Mem Sahibs have gone into the fort, and I should like to know who is to get them out of it. Touba! Touba! There will not be a Nazarene to send to the Shaitan who waits for them. Thou hast delayed too long, my friend, and had better try elsewhere.'

'Not too long, Dil Khan; though, had I not

been as I am, it would have been different. Could I help this?' and he pointed to the wound. 'Let it pass. The men are ready now, if thou art ready. Speak!'

'Ahem! the Moulvee is not returned yet,' said the Nawab, hesitatingly, 'and till he comes I dare not act; and thou art not strong enough yet, my friend, to lead thy five hundred warriors.'

'Five hundred cowards, you mean,' exclaimed the Dacoit, scornfully. 'Fifty of them that I took with me last night, slunk away among the bushes, and ran away when the Feringee patrol was half a mile off. Are these soldiers? We must wait for true soldiers, Dil Khan.'

The Nawab rose and went away. He was not easy in mind. Not to mince the matter, he was now full of apprehension and doubt. True, wonderful news reached him from Dehly; and by the Royal Akhbars he was informed that thousands of Nazarene Kafirs were being daily sent to the infernal regions, that the victories of the Imperial armies were perpetual, that thousands upon thousands of true believers had already made their obeisance to the Asylum of the World, and that, when all the English had perished, the Emperor would take the field in person and receive the congratulations of his loyal and devoted sub-

jects. But with some of these news letters, had come a letter from his second wife's brother, which set that ambitious dame a-crying, and did not quite corroborate the news of the Akhbars. The English army was lying behind the ridge above the city, and blazing shells were being fired from their batteries which wounded many, and turned men's livers into water. There were Sepoys in thousands, and more arriving by regiments; but there was no head to them, and they often quarrelled and sometimes fought among themselves. Where was her husband, of whom such great expectations had been formed? Why did he not appear with his warriors and defend the King of Kings? Why did he dally with necessity, and shelter himself in the Fort of Noorpoor, which of course he had taken long ago?

It was very well for her brother to ask such questions, yet how was she to answer them? Dil Khan could not only not give her comfort, but found himself railed at by the fierce woman for cowardice, for inaction, for ingratitude to his benefactor the Emperor, who had bestowed the highest honours upon him. He could not persuade his wife that the tinsel necklace which was hardly worth ten rupees, or the robe of honour which proved on examination to

be soiled and frayed, would not move an army or supply his pressing necessities; and, failing to establish this point, he left the furious woman to her passionate weeping, and went to the 'Star of Women,' who was not often, perhaps, favoured with a visit.

But here more vexation awaited him. The good lady had no patience to hear tales of Imperial victims, or catalogues of infidel Feringees, sent to keep the 'Shaitan' company. She was, at heart, a true friend to the English. The 'Mem' Sahibs of Noorpoor had always been gracious and kind to her, and she loved them; as to the sweet Missy Mostyn, she would rather go to her and protect her herself than she should come to any harm. The 'Star of Women' had been a local beauty, and had many local connections of some weight, as landholders, all around Futtehpoor. With them she had constant intercourse, and she knew that to a man, though they might be helplessly neutral for a time, yet if opportunity offered, they would strike in for the English.

Under these circumstances, the Nawab found himself reproached, not bitterly perhaps, but very sadly; reminded of the long friendship which had existed with the English from the days of Lord Lake to the present. Was all this to

be thrown away and his very life and estates risked?

I wish, indeed, that the course of this history admitted of my showing my readers more of this excellent woman; kind, charitable, benevolent to her dependants, content and thankful for her lot—in spite of the younger sister wife—pious after the tenets of her faith, simple and gracious in her manners, and beloved and honoured by all—there was no more popular or respected lady in the country, or one who had more deeply gained the affections both of Mahomedans and Hindoos, than Nujm-ool-Nissa Khanum.

'What should you do?' she said, in answer to her lord's question, as he sat before her with his turban awry and his forefinger between his teeth; 'what should you do? Why, go to the Brigadier, and the Judge Sahib, at once. Say you have been misled, ask them to forgive you, and proclaim by beat of drum that you will stand by the English to the end; for in the end, my lord, they will conquer all. Did they not conquer before? If the Almighty has sent a scourge upon them, they will bow to it, and rise again. If you will not go, send me to the Judge's lady. I would go to the Queen of England for you, if there were need. O, my lord! let not men speak evil of you, but

rely upon the faithful English to reward you, as they will, for loyalty.'

'They took Jhansy and Nagpoor,' he said, bitterly; 'since then I have not trusted them. Let them die, as they are dying everywhere, and will die. Had their fathers been like this generation, my ancestors had fought them to the death, as I will do! Inshallah! as I will do! Be silent, if you value my favour and your own honour! else——'

'I have but spoken the truth,' she replied, meekly, 'the rest is in God's hands. May He protect you, and lead you aright.'

All this, and much more that I need not record, afforded no comfort to the Nawab Dil Khan. There were divisions in his house, and wherever he went he had found himself opposed; and more than once, for several days, he debated in his mind whether it would not be the safest and wisest plan, after all, to go to Mr. Mostyn and the Brigadier, and cast his lot with them frankly and truly. There was nothing to cheer him and support him, as he was. If he went to the secret chamber, he found his guest either raving from the effects of the drug he smoked, or the opium he swallowed; or sunk into a maudlin condition, crying to the devils he worshipped, or defying or

entreating 'Seeta.' On all points, therefore, the Nawab Sahib was troubled, and miserable enough; finding his only consolation in submission to his fate—his 'Kismut'—to lead him as it would.

It had needed, indeed, the influence of the Moulvee, to arouse Dil Khan from his lethargy and perplexed helplessness of mind; and in due time that worthy appeared: full of confidence, radiant with news of victories in Oudh, at Cawnpoor, at Futtehgurh, at Banda, besides those of Jhansy and many other places. The Nana Sahib of Bithoor had collected the mutineers of the provinces around him, who, with all their guns and munitions of war, were preparing to march to Dehly on the one hand and Calcutta on the other, where all the English 'Kafirs' were to be driven into their ships or into the sea. There had been risings in the Rajpoot States, and the native troops of Sindia and Holkar, impatient at the inaction of their masters, had in part mutinied; and were preparing to take the field when the rains should cease and their artillery could travel.

The whole of the Mahratta 'Campoo,' the old battalions of the French heroes, an army in themselves, will join the Nana Sahib, who is to be Péshwah. At Poona, the Mahratta Princes are ready, and their people to a man. Arcot, Vellore, Ser-

ingapatam, and the Moslems of the South, are waiting the last signal, and at Hyderabad and Nagpoor all is ready. Will you linger in the race for glory to the Faith?' cried the Moulvee with excitement. 'I have been long absent, I know, but I have travelled far and fast, and have gathered the news I now give you from English sources, not our own.' Even the English newspapers are full of alarm and apprehension.'

'And Dehly?' asked the Nawab.

'Events never looked brighter or better,' he replied. 'The English army there breaks its strength against the old fortress, like waves against a rock, and falls back in flakes of powerless foam. They get no nearer to the walls; their guns are worn out, and they have no new ones. Ha! ha! ha! let them rage there. When we all move against them, they will be swept from the face of the earth and sent to hell. Now I have news for you: I have been to Jhansy, and have seen Lukshmee Bye, the Ranee. She would have you join her after Noorpoor is taken. She has twenty thousand men. Though the English took her kingdom once, she has already recovered it. She has opened up all the treasures that were hidden, and she is generous and open-handed. The Nana supports her with a hundred thousand men.

The Talookdars of Oudh, with fifty thousand. I tell you they have more than two lakhs (200,000) of soldiers now under my knowledge. Join those to the armies at Dehly, at Gualior, at Indoor, everywhere, and what have you? Five hundred thousand warriors for the Faith at least! while, if there are ten thousand English troops now in all Hind, widely scattered and unable to help each other, it is all. Is he with you; he, the Brahmin—the Jogee—what you will—who seemed to hold the men of Noorpoor in his hand? What has he been doing?'

'He was badly wounded in the face, and I thought he would have died. So he has done nothing,' replied the Nawab; 'and I am tired of him; for, whether from weakness, or from smoking Ganja, he has become a dreaming enthusiast, seeing visions of the devils he worships, and altogether very unpleasant company; but he is stronger now, and his wound is nearly healed.'

'Good!' returned the Moulvee, rubbing his hands. 'I have brought him a few old friends, who did good work at Jhansy. They will cheer him up, I dare say. You need not look alarmed, Nawab Sahib, they will do you no harm.'

'It was not that,' said the Nawab, 'only—suppose they should hear it at Noorpoor, they might——'

'Of course, I mean that they should hear. What else were you thinking about? I say leave these Oudh men to themselves; they know what to do and how to do it too. When you have all the Noorpoor Sepoys about you, you will feel strong, and can march to Jhansy. Now you are weak, you think, eh?' Was that what you thought of, my friend?'

Nawab Dil Khan sighed; what could he do before his 'Kismut,' and he sighed again. That must decide for him now, for he had no energy of mind to resist the Moulvee, and the men had arrived too. There was a stir in the courtyard without, and an attendant announced that the Sepoys demanded instant admittance. The Nawab nodded assent, and the Moulvee said for him, 'Let them come in and make their salaams,' and a moment afterwards about twenty men, entering with their right hands upheld, raised a shout of 'Joy Kalee Mata!' 'Nawab Dil Khan Bahadoor ke Jey!'

'Ye are welcome, my friends,' said the Nawab, rising; 'welcome to a poor house; will ye not be seated?'

The men made military salutes, and sat down on their heels in two rows. They were in undress, but they wore their belts over their clothes, and

held their muskets in their hands, ready for use if it might be necessary. Grand stout fellows all of them, like their brethren everywhere; twisting up their mustachios, and looking round them with a curious interest, at the high arched hall, and at the Nawab, by turns. Not one of them spoke.

'This brave soldier,' said the Moulvee, joining his hands to the Nawab, 'is Colonel Goor Bux Tewaree, once a Havaldar of Artillery, and now commander of all the Artillery at Jhansy, with the rank of "Colonel." Be pleased to let your favour rest upon him. Colonel Sahib,' he added to the man, 'rise, and sit among us, as a friend. I think your people may be dismissed to rest, for they have had a long march,' and, at a signal from their leader, all rose, and repeating their military salute, filed out of the hall.

Then the three entered upon the condition of the country, the disposition of Hurpál Singh, and the chances of carrying Noorpoor; and the result was not pleasing to the ex-Havaldar, nor did it tally with the florid picture which the Moulvee Sahib had drawn at Jhansy. The quick military eye of Goor Bux had detected at once the utter weakness and uselessness of the Nawab's levies, and he half regretted he had come so far on such an errand. He heard that Hurpál Singh was a ruf-

tion, bent only on local plunder, and of no use as an ally. There remained, therefore, only the garrison of Noorpoor. 'Where is Azráel Pandé, thy Gooroo?' asked Goor Bux. 'Why is he not here to meet me? Before we decide on anything I must see him.'

'If you are not afraid of a madman, I will take you to him myself,' said the Nawab. 'For my own part I always take this in case of trouble,' and he pointed to his pistol; 'but he will not fear you, who were once his pupil. You will remain here, Moulvee Sahib, and we will return presently.' Then he rose and opened the staircase door, and, motioning to Goor Bux to follow, began to descend the steps, telling his companion as he did so, of Azráel Pandé's wound, and his raving, and his terrible cry of 'Hrrám, Hrrám, Hrrám!'

'Ah,' said the man, 'I see he has been reading the "Gurúra Poorán." That is what comes to most of them. No, I am not afraid; lead on.'

CHAPTER VI.

CONSPIRACY.

We have seen the place, and the man who lived there; and his weird worship, and his alternate fits of gloom and excitement. Perhaps, knowing the fearful nature of the course to which Azrael had committed himself, and the unhallowed arts and rites he practised, even his former pupil and friend shuddered as he approached the room; and, Foorsut, who was sitting in the outer chamber, whispered to the Nawab, 'You had better wait; they are all with him now, and his shrieks have been worse than ever. He has drawn his sword and has been worshipping it. I had to kill a cock for his sacrifice this morning, to smear it with blood; look!'

'Let me go to him,' said Goor Bux, 'I know a spell that will quiet him, be he never so violent, if indeed he be not gone beyond that. Stay here till I call; you must not shoot him; nor must he kill you;' and he stepped on lightly into the gloom.

Goor Bux had a strong iron-bound quarter-staff in his hand, and feared no sword; but what he saw arrested his steps at once.

The light was dim, and the room was so full of the smoke of burning incense, that the cresset in a niche of the wall barely burned. Far off, as it seemed, two smaller lamps glimmered before a rude low shrine or altar, in front of which Azrácl Paudé was sitting bare-headed, and with only a narrow silk cloth about his loins, in an attitude of devotion or meditation, reading from a narrow oblong book which lay on the ground before him. By his side, and ready to his hand, a naked sabre, spotted and stained with gouts of blood and spots of red powder, glistened in the light, and he was muttering, in low tones, the weird Sanscrit incantation which has been quoted, in part, before.

Goor Bux at a glance knew it was the man he sought; but O! how fearfully altered! The long gaunt body and neck were now little better than skin and bone; the very skin was withered and wrinkled. The powerful muscles of the arms were, perhaps, less wasted, and rose sharp and iron-like in their outlines. The hands, spread out on the thighs, were long and lean, their dark purple veins, as also the veins of the forehead, standing out like knotted cords. But the face was hardly

to be recognised as Goor Bux saw it. The right side seemed almost gone, and a wide cicatrix, hardly yet healed, covered the jaw and most part of the neck and cheek, and had drawn down the lower eyelid and the corner of the mouth, in a ghastly manner, which gave a frightful expression to the countenance.

'Hrrám! Hrrám! Hrrám!' shrieked the Dacoit, starting to his feet, seizing his sword, and cutting into the air with a force which caused every stroke to whistle.

"Destroy, destroy!
Pierce, pierce!
With thy trident,
Reeking with blood!
Come, come,
O! Mahéswara,
O! Kapalini,
O! Kamarini,
O! Máha Káli!
Enter, enter,
Hear and come!
Hear and come!
Hear and come!

Then he stood erect, with his sword stretched out, panting for breath, and his eyes staring into vacancy. 'She does not come,' he said moodily, as the point of his sword dropped with a helpless action, and he almost fell into his former position. 'She will not come till there is more blood.

She is hungry, she thirsts! Will that poor sacrifice satisfy her? Nay, but see! see! there!'

Before he could rise, Goor Bux had divested himself of his upper clothing, stepped behind him, and muttered a Sunserit spell, which had a strange effect. Azrúel sat, as it were stiffened. No feature moved, and his glassy eyes looked out with no speculation in them into the gloom. Then the other took incense from a brass plate near, and some of the red powder beside it, with which he smeared his forehead; and entering within the magic circle which Azrúel had marked around himself, first made obeisance to the altar, and, kneeling down before him, drew several long respirations in succession.

'Enough,' he muttered, 'enough, Mother divine! else I should be like him,' and he sat down and watched; but not for long. Azrúel seemed to sigh, the tension of his neck relaxed, and as his chin fell on his breast, tears dropped silently from his eyes upon his hands.

'Rise, Azrúel Pandé!' cried his companion; 'I, Goor Bux Tewaree am nigh thee, and greet thee in the name of the Mother. Joy Dévee! Kalee Mata ke Joy! Máha kalee ke Joy! Arise, and embrace your pupil. Ah! if thou hadst not taught me that spell, Gooroojee, the Mother had taken thee.'

'Thou, Goor Bux? How, art thou here?'

'He brought me,' returned the man pointing to the Nawab, 'else who could have found thee here under the earth?'

'What hast thou done?' asked Azráel eagerly. 'My terrible dream is gone from me now; speak! are they dead? The English!'

'All that were at Jhansy,' said Goor Bux; 'we kept them all safe; then I made a great sacrifice to the Mother, and had them all killed for her as you bid me. There were nearly a hundred.'

'And you spared none?'

'Not one; nor child, nor mother, nor maid; but they have killed more at Cawnpoor, hundreds! The Nana Sahib left none alive! Ah! the Mother has drunk much blood! but thou, her priest and votary—how is it thou hast sent none? Beware lest she take thee; thou art perilously near her when she comes on thy calling!'

'I know it, I know it,' returned Azráel, gloomily; 'she comes and returns empty; and I must follow when she beckons, for I have sent her no blood from Noorpoor.'

'Will you come with me to the men, Goorroojee, and rouse them?'

'I am weak,' answered Azráel; 'but the sight of thee has given me new life, and there is some-

thing, perhaps, in this wasted body still;' and he rose up, and struck the hollow of his thighs and his breasts in succession with the palms of his hands, like an athlete.

'Shabash! well done, friend; that was done like a wrestler. Now thou wilt be thyself again,' cried the Nawab.

'Let him stay here with me, and let his people put up in the garden,' said Azrael to the Nawab. 'One day with them, seeing their familiar faces, and hearing the speech and songs of my country, will give me new life to me. We can pull down the wall, there, and let in air and light, and they can come and go as they please.'

'Be it so, friend,' said the Nawab, 'and truth to say, I knew not where to put them. But if they are content with the garden pavilion, they are welcome to it; only do not let them light fires there.'

'Let me go and tell them, then,' said Goor Bux. 'I will bring them hither, and the Nawab Sahib can send our provisions here. I will not be long away.'

But several days still passed, and no move was made on either side. Strange, Foorsut thought, that he had not seen Buldeo since he had come to Ryna. Where could he be? Nor was he at

Noorpoor with Mr. Brandon, for Foorsut, on some pretence, had gone away for a few hours, to look for him. 'But I must go now,' he said to himself, 'for the new men have come, and there will be evil; and Azráel will not miss me among his friends.' Nor indeed did he. The wall in the arch was pulled down, the room opened to the well, and Azráel could sit looking at the brawny youths who swam and splashed and dived in the water, and passed the day with song, and tale, and laughter, as in the old times of the Thirty-fourth. It was strange to see how the Dacoit's energy grew again powerful; and how his strength had improved by the time a week was past. Much of the old force had returned to him; and when his friend was sure of this, there could be no longer delay.

Goor Bux had already sent spies into the cantonment, who had seen men of both regiments; but there did not appear among them that unanimity which was essential to success. It is not to be supposed that such a condition of affairs could restrain two such men as the ex-Havaldar and Azráel Panchi. It was evident they must go themselves; and they went one night to a village near Noorpoor, whence they proceeded on foot, to another deserted temple, on the outskirts of

the town, situated on the bare upland, where there was no possibility of surprise.

This old building occupied the summit of a *low round hill, now covered* with short green grass; and from its porch could be seen the lake, the town, the fort now twinkling with lights, and the camp. There was no moon, and the sky was overcast; nor was there any light in the temple. Those assembled sat in darkness, and scouts had been placed at distances around. There was silence among the group huddled together before the steps of the porch; but the night wind, heavy with moisture, sighed through the pillars of the low hall, while the unearthly cries of hyenas and jackals came up from the outskirts of the town, as they fought over the garbage and carrion which had been thrown there. I need not, I think, record what passed, for there was little new to be told. What there was to say, was left by Azrâel Pandé to his more experienced colleague, who took up a new line of persuasion, and could at least assure his listeners, that all ranks who joined the Ranee of Jhansy, or the Nana Sahib of Bithoor, drew double pay; that he, a Havaldar, a sergeant, was now a full colonel, with five thousand rupees a year, an elephant and retinue; that the Ranee and the Nana Sahib

required all the men they could get; and all this seemed, to those who heard it, a far more rational ground for action than the ravings of Azráel Pandé. Goor Bux could also tell them of the armies in Oudh, of the work doing in the siege of the Residency of Lucknow, and that the Talookdars were up, and their old Rajahs were fighting for the Faith. How Delhi held out, and how Gualior and Indoor were coming in turn; for on all these points he was as well informed as the Moulvee.

'Come, some of you,' continued Goor Bux, 'to Futtehpoor. You can get away after roll-call, and be back before gun-fire in the morning, and I will ask the Nawab to have a nauch, when we can discuss these matters more comfortably than in this dark hole, and see each others' faces.'

This was a new and pleasant phase of the matter, far pleasanter than 'Azráel's fierce denunciations and appeals to religion and loss of caste. None of them had lost their caste, none had eaten flour mixed with bone-dust, none had handled the greased cartridges; but double pay and a share in the glories their brethren were winning everywhere, were inducements which could hardly be refused, and to ratify these there would be a nauch too, for which any of them would have gone further than to Futteh-

poor; and thus the invitation was cordially acceded to by the delegates. On the fourth day they were to visit Futtehpoor, and come to the Nawab's garden, where they would be welcomed.

Meanwhile, Foorsut had betaken himself to the neighbourhood of Mr. Brandon's house, and the hooting of a horned owl, which Buldeo knew perfectly, arose from the trees in the garden, now soft, now loud, and changing its place constantly. How well Buldeo recognised the old signal! His brother was alive, then; no other could hoot like that. So he arose silently, and went out from Seeta's cottage, where he now slept, and betook himself to the garden, answering the cry, but in a shriller tone; and while the police sentinel was throwing stones into the trees, Buldeo found his brother, and by the cessation of the hooting the sentinel was no doubt satisfied that he had driven the ill-omened night-birds away.

There was not much time for talking, for Foorsut was anxious to return; but he told his brother where Azrael was, and of the terrible time he had passed with him. 'Now,' he continued, 'Goor Bux, the Artillery Havaldar, from Jhansy, and twenty-five of his men have arrived, and Azrael is become a new man. They are at the Temple to-night to meet men from the regi-

ments here: shall we go and listen in the old place?' The idea was delightful to Buldeo, and, returning for his spear, the brothers set off together, Buldeo giving by the way a relation of his own adventures and his unavailing search for his brother.

At the old Temple, however, there was no one. Both pryed curiously about and listened for an hour or more, but all was silent as the grave. It was evident there was some other place of meeting, and, as they parted, Foorsut said, 'The time is near now. Goor Bux Tewaree is not one to be idle, and our Maharaj has become young again. The Havaldar said a spell over him which drove away the devils and "Seeta," and he does not smoke half the Gánja he used to do. All this is bad—and they must be careful up yonder,' and he pointed to the fort, 'and stir not till the peril is past. I will come with further news when I can. Now I must go, brother,' and they embraced and parted.

To Cyril Brandon this news was not, perhaps, unexpected; but what could be done more than was done? In the fort, all was secure and vigilant, and without? Well, a few days more, perhaps, would determine; and by the Brigadier all officers were enjoined to gather

what information they could, and to watch the tempers of the men very narrowly.

When the new 'Colonel' Sahib proposed a nauch to the Nawab, Dil Khan appeared to enter into the idea with great satisfaction. Of course the Sepoys should have a nauch; nay; he would even write to the Brigadier to allow Sepoys to come to the party, so as the more to throw him off his guard; but to this both Goor Bux and the Moulvee objected. 'His heart is only half with us, my friend,' said the Moulvee, 'and he might—you know I don't say he would—let the Brigadier know that you and Azmúd Pandé are here, and bring down the white people upon us, and there are nearly three hundred and fifty of them at Noorpoor, if the officers are counted.' So the Sepoys were not invited, and Máma Jumeelá was privately dispatched to Noorpoor to negotiate with the famous Peri Buksh and some other dancers and singers to come and perform. Not in gorgeous attire, as she had gone to visit Seeta, did the dame proceed to Noorpoor this time, but in plain if not mean attire, and in a closed litter of humble pretensions and appearance, which excited no attention; and thus she was set down in the courtyard of the Peri's house, outside a very substantial, even respectable-looking

mansion, though perhaps the least that is said of its interior, the better.

As Máma Jumeela withdrew her bulky figure from the confined litter, she stretched herself, and, seeing the Peri come into the verandah of the basement to enquire who had arrived, held out her arms to her, and waddling up the steps, embraced her young friend, and cracked her fingers and even elbow-joints over her after her most peculiarly loving fashion. I do not need to mention the terms of the bargain that had to be driven; but the issue was that, for a handsome present from the Nawab, and what she might gather from the spectators, Peri Buksh was to come early the next Thursday, and stay as long as she pleased in the castle, and Máma Jumeela, having achieved so much of her purpose, betook herself to the minor stars of Noorpoor.

Peri Buksh was the type of many of her sisterhood at Noorpoor and elsewhere. She had come of a 'good family' of dancers and singers, the oldest in the province, and most renowned. Centuries ago, her progenitors had sung and danced before kings of Malwah and Khandésh, who had invested the family with privileges and endowed them with lands: and before Akbar and Aurungzebe, who had confirmed these grants. Very often

had the Peri to perform long journeys and to sing and dance at saints' tombs or at village temples, to fulfil hereditary obligations and obtain her dues; and if she could not go herself, she sent one of her subordinates, of whom there were several, who had been adopted or purchased, and educated for their profession in life. The family of the Peri were therefore esteemed 'highly respectable,' and she, by hereditary right, was the head of the district guild of 'tuwaifs,' or dancers, and thus possessed considerable influence and authority. Of course, she, as every one else, had heard of the bad wind of Sumbut, 1914, but it had not affected her. If her politics were considered, I think she would have been found on the side of the English, who, she said, were 'good people, and helped her very often.' And, like most others, she had a special reverence for Mr. Brandon, whom she esteemed a popular hero. I will not say either, that she had not tried to fascinate him sometimes; but she found him, though always accessible and civil, cold as ice, and perhaps respected him the more. When he married the goldsmith's granddaughter she was charmed by the act; and also by the kindness he showed to his wife. 'He is a good fellow,' she said to her people, 'and if all the

Feringees were like him, 'we should hear no more of this bad wind.' Such being her sentiments, she would rather the Nawab had not asked her to come and dance for him; but she could not well refuse, for many of her rights and lands lay among his villages; and if, as was said might happen, he became master of the country, he would punish her for contumacy.

The Peri was a fine full-grown woman of about twenty; not very fair, perhaps, in complexion, nor yet dark, nor very tall either, but with a round supple figure of exquisite proportions, which she well knew how to use in her dances. She had, moreover, a very pretty face, with a well-shaped mouth and fine eyes, with the use—or misuse—of which she was perfectly acquainted. She had been educated too, to some extent, in Persian and Hindee, in the latter of which she kept her accounts; and, indeed, she was a very keen lover of money. When the Peri at the proper time, therefore, appeared in the Nawab's hall of audience, the many chandeliers of which had been specially lighted, a general murmur of applause ran round the guests, who sat on both sides of the fine room, leaving the centre free for the performance. She was dressed in a close-fitting garment, with long sleeves and a very full skirt,

much plaited in at the waist, made of the finest transparent muslin of a light violet colour, trimmed, nearly to her waist, with rows of broad gold brocade lace, as also about her shoulders and bust with the same. This dress was confined slightly at her waist by a scarf of bright green muslin spotted with gold, whose ends of gold brocade fell on her left side, and had the effect of raising the skirt a little so as to show her trousers of the richest cloth of gold. With one end tucked into her waistband, a splendid Benares scarf, of filmy amber muslin gauze, profusely flowered with gold, having borders and ends of the same, passed over her left arm and head, and fell over her right shoulder. The gold ornaments on her head and arms were all handsome and in great profusion; and her gold anklets, whose tiny bells chinked as she walked, had a row of large diamonds on their bands, which flashed as she moved, and gave a charming effect to the tiny graceful feet on which they rested.

The girl, with two companions, also nearly as richly attired as herself, and her band of musicians, advanced slowly up the hall, and having made a profound obeisance to the Nawab, and slighter salutations to the Moulvee and the 'Colonel Sahib,' who sat on each side of him, with a gen-

eral sweep of her hand to all that were sitting around, the party sat down, forming one of the principal and most beautiful groups present. There were many other spectators; officers of the Nawab's own levies and household; and the Sepoys who had come from Hansy and Noorpoor, all mingled together now, sat in rows upon their heels, in almost a kneeling posture, as the most respectful: their faces tied up with gay scarfs over their jaunty bright turbans, and their general expression grim and stolid.

There was nothing particular in the dance, for Indian women dancers only move in short tinkling steps to their simple music; but in the litho supple sway of her figure, and of her small graceful head and neck, the Peri, always remarkable, now exceeded herself. She appeared, in a spirit of mischief, to address herself particularly to the Moulvee; who sat blinking on his seat, stroking his long thin beard, and telling his beads. His round bullet head and sanctimonious expression, apparently defiant of the girl's charms, provoked her to use them freely. If the Moulvee were proof against the dancing, or had been able to restrain himself, he was far otherwise when the Peri began to sing, for her voice was indeed very rich and beautiful, and her shake perfect. For

one song she was especially celebrated; and the Nawab, calling her to him, whispered to her to sing it. 'Sing it to him,' he said, pointing to the Moulvee, 'and do not spare him.'

I dare say many of my readers have heard 'Soobah dumood, Shub goozusht,' with its refrain 'Soono, zera i-gooftogoo,' and will follow this version of the original, though its force and spirit can hardly be rendered.

The morn has broke,
The night is past,
From sleep awoke,
I rise at last.
O, dumool dear!
Wert thou a dream?
Thine eyes so clear
In witching gleam!

Listen; to all I have to tell!
Last night, beside the river's brink,
The ruby wine, by sips, I drink,
A charmer near me blushing sits,
Brightly the torch-light past us flits.
Around her form I cast my arms,
Fearing no ill but love's alarms;
Yet, when I wake, I'm all alone!
My Fairy, and her love, are gone!
Ah, yes! perchance it was a dream!

II.

No! not a dream! I see her yet!
With wine I drank, my lips are wet;
The fierce delight still through me thrills,
The passion which all reason kills!

As heart to heart, and lip to lip,
I, from my charmer, nectar sip,
O! rapture that I dare not tell!
Nor longer on its torture dwell.
Alas! 'twas sweet, and yet a dream!

III.

I rested in the garden's shade,
Around me fountains softly play'd;
Their lulling, murm'ring, waters' sound,
Lulled me to rest in sleep profound.
But now, again, that vision 's near!
Scares away sleep with trembling fear!
I linger on those rosy lips,
Once more, my soul thelr nectar sips!
Away! 'twas but an idle dream!

The moon has broke,
The night is past, &c., &c.

Some of my readers, too, may be able to follow the singer in the expressive action which the words demanded; and who could exceed the accomplished Peri Buksh in pantomime? The graceful swaying of her body, the now repelling now inviting action of her beautiful arms, the glances she shot from her sparkling eyes, and the rapid evolutions of her tinkling feet, were simply enthralling and bewitching to an extent the Moulvee had never before encountered; and his *sotto voce* expressions of wonder and admiration, which his sacred calling forbade him to express aloud, could hardly be restrained from bursting forth with the

loud cries of 'Shabash!' 'Bravo!' 'Success to you my darling!' and the like, which arose from the guests and Sepoys all round the room. This, however, though gracefully acknowledged by the Peri with smiles and waves of the hand, did not satisfy the girl. Suddenly she sat down close to the Moulvee alone, but followed by her musicians: and winding and waving her arms to and fro, while her jewelled hands almost touched his face, sang,

'As heart to heart, and lip to lip,
I, from my charmer, nectar sip,
O! rapture that I dare not tell!'

Again and again were the words repeated, until the Moulvee fidgetted upon his seat, looked this way and that, spluttering out exclamations partly of admiration and partly repellant of the witching damsel.

'Ya Alla! Begone, shameless one! Where am I? Wonderful—enchanting—tormenting slut! Bravo!—Alla defend me! Witch, sorceress, begone! Nay, stay! La houl illa! Punna, punna! protect me, protect me! Ya Kuheer, Ya Kureem O!' he cried, with increasing fervour at every ejaculation.

'You had better give her a couple of [redacted] mohurs, Moulvee Sahib, and let her go,'

Nawab, laughing heartily, as indeed were most of the company.

'Touba, Touba! Begone, witch!' cried the priest, fumbling in his pocket for the coin, and taking out several. 'Thy spell is on me! begone!' and he dropped the gold coins into her hand.

'I should like to dance before the throne of the king of kings,' said the girl, joining her hands demurely as she rose. 'Thou wilt not forget me, Moulvee Sahib, when I come to Dehly to witness the rejoicings on his victory.'

'No! I will not forget!' he replied. 'Go! Shookr, Shookr! thanks, thanks! a thousand!' he continued to the Nawab, and taking a long breath; 'anything to get rid of her.' And he resettled himself in his seat and shut his eyes, telling his beads with increasing rapidity and saintly fervour.

'She will come again, Moulvee Sahib. The Peri is seldom content with one visit; she will have some more of your gold pieces,' said the Nawab, in a whisper.

'Nay! God forbid!' returned the priest, piously. 'Keep her away! keep her away, for the love of the Prophet! she hath cast a spell on me already. Michael! Ya Jibbrael!' he cried, invoking [illegible]ls; 'deliver me from her magic and

sorcery. Ameen! Ameen! Touba! Touba! Only to think of it—that I, Zeb Oolla—should feel the power of a witch!"

But the Peri did not return. She wandered hither and thither about the hall, sitting down wherever she found a likely group; and the Sepoys, altogether charmed, gave bountifully. I think that night the girl reaped a plenteous harvest. But she had done more. At first, a few apparently careless words had reached her ear which caused her to listen more attentively, as she saw the ex-Havaldar go from group to group, and give his orders; and changing her place more frequently after her performance was finished, she heard the men conversing in low tones of what was to be done to-morrow, at the evening roll-call, when the Noorpoor troops should rise. And after she had received her dismissal, and was quitting the Nawab's palace, Máma Jumeela met her with an excited manner, and took her aside.

'It will all be done to-morrow,' she said, in a whisper, 'and I will go on an elephant with a thousand men and bring away the girls myself.'

'What girls?' asked the Peri.

'Missy Mostyn and the Goldsmith girl,' she replied; 'both are wanted. But don't tell, "[illegible] your life."'

CHAPTER VII

A WARNING BEFORE OUTBREAK.

Grace Mostyn and Seeta were sitting in the octagon room next morning, for it was always quiet and safe from intrusion. Cyril would not have his wife fear the ladies of Noorpoor, now that she was among them in the fort, on common ground; and once Seeta had been sitting in what was called the ladies' drawing room, in the old Pathan Palace, which was common to all, with Mrs. Mostyn and Grace, when several had come in, and she thought had stared rudely at her, wilfully round her, and eyeing her from head to foot with suspicious wonder. Mrs. Smith had been one of these, with Mrs. Home and one or two others of their 'set;' and after, as Mrs. Smith said, 'they'd had a good look at her,' they went away to discuss poor Seeta's appearance, not certainly in a flattering manner.

'I wouldn't sit in the room with a "nigger" woman,' said Mrs. Smith afterwards, indignantly [illegible] sir, 'no, not for worlds! and you may

say what you like about her being pretty and fair, and all that. She is none the less "a nigger," my dears, one of the horrible black people we live among, who would murder us, as they murdered the poor dear things at Dehly and Jhansy, if they could. I'm not going to have her come and sit there just as if she was one of us. I shall make Smith complain to the Brigadier, if she attempts it, I can tell you. Mrs. Mostyn may have black people in her own room if she likes, that's her husband's affair: but the idea of her bringing one here! Just think of it, my dears!'

'I quite agree with you, Maria dear,' said Mrs. Home, 'and I shall not allow Lucy to go to Grace Mostyn for lessons, if that black girl is to be there. Only just think of my darling girl being exposed to such contamination! I hear these black women are *horrible* in their conversation among themselves. My ayah tells me *such* stories. Things, you know, that I should be ashamed to mention, even to you, my dears; and how Grace Mostyn can teach *that* girl, passes my comprehension entirely. Certainly, she appears to like teaching, just like a governess, you know; at least, Lucy says so.'

'And I have no doubt she was one,' said Mrs. Smith exultingly, and as if a new light had entered her mind. 'Now I think of it, the way she plays

and sings is *quite* professional, and she knows ever so much Italian and German. Yes, depend upon it, she was taught how to teach. No one knows, my dears, what girls have been before they are brought out to be married. One ought to be most careful whom one knows, really one ought. Why, that dreadful prosy old "Mother Pratt," as the boys in the regiment call her, was only a missionary, and was never in *good* society; and Mrs. Mostyn, for all she is the judge's wife, need not be so stuck up about that "governess" sister of her husband's. Bah! I wonder any of you can endure any of them, the nasty conceited things.'

I think we may conclude from the foregoing that Mrs. Mostyn, Grace, and poor Seeta had little in common with this 'set' of the Noorpoor ladies, and that Grace preferred quiet mornings in the octagon room in the tower, where Cyril seldom came to disturb them. For although they had removed to the fort, he and Mr. Noble still attended the Kucherry regularly, and though there was comparatively little to do, in local matters, the reports of the district native officers required close attention, and immediate replies. Baba Sahib was busy with the revenue and statistical returns, and, in short, as far as ordinary current business was concerned, there was ample employment for all.

There was now a break in the monsoon, which had, as yet, been exceptionally heavy. The weather was much like English summer, fresh, soft, and warm, with light clouds flying before the regular south-western breeze, and their shadows chasing each other over the lake and fair landscape, spread out beneath the friends as they looked from the oriel window, sometimes joined by Mrs. Mostyn, but more frequently alone, reading or working, or Grace drawing as usual. The lake, now full, and sparkling in the bright sun, or changing when a 'cloud passed over it, as Seeta said, 'like Grace's sweet blue eyes,' was ever new to them; while the distance beyond was even more variable in the soft purple tints of the rugged mountains. As to the old fort, its towers and walls, with views from its ramparts, the quaint old buildings, and the many elegant portions of Pathán Gothic architecture with which they abounded—had already afforded Grace quite a small portfolio of sketches and drawings: and Cyril, when he returned from his work, was always ready to put in groups of figures, with his accustomed spirit and skill.

So, on the morning after the Nawab's nauch, and as I have already recorded, Seeta and Grace were sitting together, Grace drawing, and Seeta reading

her morning lesson, when old Bheemee came to the door and said, 'Come out, lady; Buldeo and Luchmun Singh want you.' For an instant Seeta's calmness forsook her, as she thought something might have happened to her husband: but she rallied herself at once, and went out to them.

'There is a woman, a dancing girl of the town, Peri Buksh by name; I know her well,' said Buldeo, 'who is below there,' and he pointed to the water-gate, 'and wishes to see you directly. I wanted to bring her up, but the English soldiers won't let her pass, and I can't speak to them.'

'What does she want?' asked Seeta, 'I know no dancing girl here; why has she come?'

'I think it is about the Nawab,' said Luchmun Singh; 'she did not know you were here, and came to the house, looking for you, and said she had come from Futtehpoor. She was so glad when I told her that you and the ladies had been here for some days, so I brought her up. You had better come to her;' and Seeta, calling to Grace that she would be back directly, went down the slope to the gate, and found the Peri alone, sitting unconcernedly among the English soldiers of the guard, trying to speak to them in the few words of camp English she had picked up; and laughing heartily at her own attempts. But 'Good morn-

ing, Colonel,' 'How do you do,' 'Very well,' and the like, were not suited to further her purpose. As Seeta now turned into the archway, the Peri leaped lightly from her seat to the ground, and touching her feet, put her own hands to her forehead, and eyes, and heart. 'What do you want?' asked Seeta timidly, for she did not know but that the girl was a second emissary from the Nawab.

'I cannot speak here,' said the Peri respectfully, and even humbly; 'we must be alone; you need not fear a woman, and I will tell you all.'

'I am not afraid,' replied Seeta—the girl's earnest, wistful look had at once dispelled suspicion—'come with me to my house; there is an English lady there, but she will not understand you.'

'Missy Mostyn?'

'Yes,' continued Seeta, 'she is my friend. Let her pass up with me, if you please,' she added in English to the corporal of the guard, who, as also his men, had saluted her; 'she has business with me.'

'Certainly, mum,' answered the corporal. 'We have orders to mind you. By Jove, lads,' he added as the girls passed on, 'that last's a stunner, isn't she? Such a leg and foot, as she dangled them from her seat there, I never seed afore. Why she

leaped up to the basement like a circus girl. May be she's a player; and such queer English as she has!'

'Ah! corporal,' said a grim old veteran, 'them d——d Pandies has some fine girls among 'em for certain; and that's one if I ever seed one. Look how she walks; a fine stepper. And as to Mrs. Brandon, why men, if she'd only English clothes on, bless her sweet face, she'd be the prettiest girl in the station; and how sweet she speaks, just like an English lady; to be sure.'

When Seeta had reached the octagon tower she bid her companion follow, and Grace looked up as they entered, and rose on seeing the Peri. 'Who is that?' she asked.

'She has something to tell,' said Seeta, 'and appears anxious. You don't mind her; she is a dancing girl?'

'Not at all,' said Grace. 'Indeed I should like to make a sketch of her, she is really such a lovely figure; but your husband would do her more justice. Do you think she would sit to me after she has spoken to you?'

'I will ask her, Grace. Yes, she says, you may make a picture of her; but I think she is half ready to cry,' and Seeta pressed the girl to speak freely.

The Peri's first answer was a burst of tears, in a passionate sobbing flood, and while Seeta soothed her, 'Do not touch me; do not touch me,' she cried, putting away Seeta's hands; 'I am vile and unclean. I am not worthy to come near either of you, to enter your house, or to be in your presence, for you know what I am. Every one knows Peri Buksh Tuwaif. Forgive my presumption; but there was danger, there is danger, and I came to warn you, Seeta Bye, and your friend. You are both in danger.'

'What does she say, Seeta?' asked Grace; 'she looks at me.'

'Wait, and I will tell you presently; she has not told me yet,' returned Seeta; 'she is strangely agitated.'

Yes, the hardened dancer and singer, the mocker of the saintly Moulvee, abandoned to many evil courses, was yet a softened woman as she threw herself at Seeta's feet, and clasping her knees, cried through her bitter sobs, 'They would have taken you, Seeta Bye, and you, Missy Mostyn, to Futtehpoor, and made you both their slaves. O! thank God! thank God! that you are safe, and beyond their power. Yet Mánja Jumeela and a thousand men will come for you to-night. She thinks you are yonder, below, in your houses;

but O! I vow thank-offerings to all the saints, that you are here, and that you have not refused to see me, and hear my warning.'

Then the girl told Seeta of the rising that was intended that night, and the plans of the 'Colonel' from Jhansy, either to lead the Sepoys there, or besiege Noorpoor and take it with the Nawab's guns.

'I wish my husband were here,' said Seeta anxiously to Grace. 'He must know what this girl says. See, though she is only a dancing girl, she can be loyal and true. There has been evil intended to us, my darling, but we are safe; thank God! O! thank God! I must send Buldeo to Cyril. Can you wait to speak to my lord?' she asked of the Peri, as she wrote a line to Cyril. 'You are not afraid of him,' she added as she returned from the door.

'I afraid?' replied the girl now smiling. 'No one, not even a child, is afraid of Mr. Brandon. We repeat his name when we light our lamps, and I know many a ballad about him, and you, Seeta Bye, that I could sing to you; and I know the love songs that Báz Bahadoor, the king of Mándoo, wrote for the girl who died for him, though she was but a dancing girl. She was an ancestress of mine, and she proved, as I will do to you, that we

too can love and be faithful. Now, while your husband is coming I will wait, and she can make a picture of me if she will.'

I do not know that it was a very successful sketch, for Grace was too agitated by what Seeta gradually revealed to her, to draw with her usual boldness and skill; but the face was very like, and a few light washes of colour gave the girl's draperies a reality of effect. It was a reminiscence of a day, and of an incident, which could never be forgotten.

When Cyril came, the Peri told him all her story, more calmly now, and more definitely, for she had been put at ease by Seeta and Grace, and had behaved modestly and with discretion. She was quite positive on every point, and very clear in her explanations. As she left Futtehpoor, the Nawab's 'army,' as she called it, was already under preparation. They were to march to the Nawab's boundary, and meet the Sepoys as they came away. Then all were to unite, and storm the fort.

'Keep a watchful guard on the water-gate by which I came up,' said the Peri, 'they may attack it when they find the ladies are here. At present Mama Jumeela believes they are in their houses. Now let me go, sir, and may God keep you; but I have no fear, I should have none here, were I you. If I may, lady,' she said to Seeta, 'I will

bless you both. God even hears the prayers of the dancers; and do you put your hands on my head, both of you, and I shall be grateful. Though we may never meet again, do not forget Peri Buksh,' and when she had removed their hands, and kissed them, she went away with Cyril Brandon to be passed through the gate, by which she had entered. 'Do not let a man stay below,' she said as they parted; 'better that your houses should be burnt, than that a life should be lost. Now, I have warned you.'

'I will look to it directly,' replied Cyril, 'and while I thank you in the name of all here for your good faith in coming to me, you may rely upon me that it will not be unrewarded when better times come.'

Cyril Brandon, as he rode up from his Kucherry, had noticed the men of the —— Regiment, standing in groups upon their parade ground, and talking in low tones. One fellow, who appeared excited by Ganja, or spirits, had cried 'Deen, Deen!' and some jeering laughter had followed. Had I known what the girl has told us, I would have brought away what remains of the treasure, he thought; but there is not very much left there. Then he went to the Brigadier, who had a tower like his own at the other end of the fort, above

the gate, and found him, Captain Hill, and other officers assembled, looking with their glasses to the parade grounds, and evidently thinking that there was mischief going on. Both the commanders of the regiments were there, and Captain Hobson also, who did not seem at ease about his men; and of the others, one was uneasy also, and had been warned not to go near the men by the native adjutant. As to the other he was cheerful; his faith in the attachment of his men, and his confidence in the Soobadar Major of his regiment, Drigpál Singh, could not be shaken.

Perhaps it had been a harder struggle for that fine old Soobadar Major, than his commanding officer knew. Most part of the previous night he had sat upon the parade ground, reasoning patiently with the men of all ranks, telling them of the delusions which had been sown broadcast among them, and reminding them of the victories their forefathers had won. 'Look at these scars,' he cried as he bared his chest; 'look at the honours I wear. I am a Sirdar Bahadoor, and could I be faithless? If ye rise against those who are as fathers and mothers to ye, shoot me first here, as I stand, or swear to me to be loyal. It is better to die than to see you faithless.' And he had prevailed; and their commander, who had

come on the parade with several officers, hearing the men were assembled, was welcomed with tears and sobs, and cries of loyalty and truth; yet they could hardly believe them! How many elsewhere had received like assurances, and yet had been shot down?

It was clear to the old Soobadar Major that a rising would take place; but he did not expect it for some days. Strange Sepoys, Oudh men, had been seen about, who pretended to be on their way home from the Dekhan; and, since they had been seen, there had been agitation; but, nevertheless, Drigpál Singh did not expect mutiny for some days. The Peri's information proved, however, quite correct in the sequel; and prepared at all points, the Brigadier and some of the officers, with Cyril Brandon, and Mr. Mostyn, sat on the terraced roof of the Brigadier's tower, watching what might take place, while the officers, English soldiers, and artillerymen had all taken up their posts on the towers and gates. Men do not speak much at such times, and the anxiety of all was far more intense in its pain than the actual presence of danger. Hobson and other officers had gone to their men, and few were now present.

The evening was closing in, and some lamps had even been lit in the native town. The moon was

yet young, and shed a dim uncertain light; but there was no mistaking a signal which rose high in the air from the direction of Futtehpoor. Three rockets shot up in succession, and the last broke into a shower of blood-red balls.

'Look,' cried the Brigadier, as the first rocket rose; 'we shall soon see who are true and who are faithless; for my part, I suspect all, and it is a reckless waste of life for any officer to go among the Sepoys. Those who go, must do so on their own responsibility.'

Almost as he spoke, a vast discordant clamour arose from the lines furthest from the fort, and many shots were fired in rapid succession. As a dark mass assembled on the parade ground of the ——, it swayed about for awhile, then at length seemed to consolidate itself, and marched on. 'Shall I fire, brigadier?' cried an artillery officer on the cavalier. 'I see they are the —— as yet. They are firing on the ——. I can see them through my night glass quite distinctly. None of their officers are with them.'

'Fire!' cried the Brigadier; and they saw two shells, hurtling through the air, fall among the mass, which instantly broke away and fled. And now many bright lights showed among the lines of the regiment that had mutinied, which grew into

a conflagration of the Sepoy's houses, and from the roofs of several thatched bungalows, flames arose high into the air. There was only a gentle breeze, even at the fort; but it was enough to fan the flames, the glare of which spread all over the parade ground. The guns were now silent, for there was nothing which afforded a mark, only small parties running across the plain escaping from the burning lines, to join the main body which, under shelter of some gardens and trees beyond, could not now be seen; but the sound of the tumult was appalling.

Suddenly, there broke from the further end of the infantry parade, two officers, one bareheaded, pursued by a body of cavalry at their utmost speed, brandishing their sabres which flashed in the bright light, while their shouts of 'Deen!' 'Deen!' came up on the wind clear above the roar of the flames, and the tumult everywhere. They were Captain Hobson, and young Temple, his second in command; and it was indeed, now, a race for life. Both were well mounted; but the cavalry horses were fresh and speedy, too, and it appeared as though they must be overtaken and slain before their eyes. Captain Hobson's charger seemed almost growing feeble, and he lagged behind, when Temple reined in his own, and they

were again together spurring madly. Once Hobson turned in his saddle and fired at a horseman who led the rest, and was close behind him, but who fell directly from his horse, which, after dragging his body for a time, careered riderless over the parade ground. The scene was watched with breathless and speechless interest by those who beheld it, and hope was almost dead; when again the cool watchful officer of artillery shouted 'Fire!' and shrapnell shells from both the howitzers rose slightly in the air, and burst over the mass of the pursuers, who turned and fled, leaving a ghastly, writhing heap of horses and their riders on the ground.

Then a sight ensued which gladdened many a heart. The other regiment, well formed in columns of companies, rushed out of the shelter of their lines, and with shouts of 'Joy Koompani Bahadoor!' dashed at the double up the parade, bayoneting, as they passed, the wounded troopers and Sepoys they found there. At their head rode their commander and the adjutant, with their officers along the flanks, waving their swords as the steady compact mass passed onwards, their bayonets flashing, and their scarlet uniforms glowing under the light of the fires around. Onwards! still onwards, towards the artillerists from whose

mass under cover, dropping shots now proceeded. Cyril Brandon could no longer control himself, he must strike in with the faithful, loyal men, and he might save the treasure. No one saw him go, but he was well armed with sword and revolver; he had always liked the regiment, and he was sure he could be of use. As he ran through the gates, he met Hobson and Temple just entering them, and saw Hobson was bleeding from a sabre cut in his breast, and his horse's neck and chest were dropping blood; but English soldiers were supporting him, and in the darkness and confusion, Cyril passed out of the gate.

During all the tumult, some of which, but not all, they could see from their place by the gun on the octagon bastion, Mrs. Mostyn, Grace, and Seeta stood breathless and watching. Mrs. Mostyn was almost hysterical; but Grace and Seeta were calm, and both were praying silently. They did not know what had happened; but it was evident that the Peri's warning was true as regarded the Sepoys, and it remained to be seen whether it would be as correct in regard to the attempt upon themselves. By the side of the gun, stood the Irish sergeant who commanded it, and the men, peering hither and thither through the gloom of the fast closing night, but seeing little.

'Look out, sir,' cried the sergeant to the officer who now commanded the guard at the gate below, and who, with several of his men, were standing on the bastion which rose beside the gate. 'Look out, sir; the Pandies may be trying to get round there. Wait for me, sir, before you fire.'

'All right,' answered the ensign in command, 'we're ready here. Do you keep a sharp look-out too; I shan't fire till they are close.'

Sceta's faculties were in the highest degree of tension. She was perfectly calm, and Grace ever after remembered the serene look, the almost smile, with which she gazed into the darkness below her. She had scarcely appeared to notice the discharges of artillery which echoed round the buildings of the fort: and the growing light of the conflagration falling on her face, showed it glowing and confident, with her beautiful lips parted, and her small pearly teeth glistening within them. Suddenly, she seized Grace's arm and said, 'Don't you hear them—the elephant bells clashing?'

'She's loaded wid a shell,' said the sergeant, 'and the fuze is cut for the gardin. But, bedad boys, I don't see that a round shot over it would do harm; she's able to carry that, an' more. In wid it, min, and ram it down well.' And the

sergeant took another look down the piece, and was satisfied that the aim was correct. The glare of the fire was now shining on the gun, and upon the lawn of Cyril Brandon's garden, and the sergeant could see all there clearly.

Yes! nearer and nearer, came the bells, and suddenly some torchbearers appeared in the road behind Cyril's house, followed by a motley crowd of native foot soldiers, carrying bright matchlocks, and running at a steady pace. Then they dashed round the corner of the house, followed by an elephant, in the howdah of which some one was sitting.

'Be jabers,' cried the sergeant, who was looking along the gun, 'it's the gineral of the Pandies! If that baste 'ud only stand still now, for a minnit, I'd have him. Steady, all of yez, and mind when I say fire.'

The elephant was still. Some one in the howdah was talking to men who had been through the house and cottage. The figure was dressed like a man, but the features could not be distinguished, though the light of the many torches and of the conflagration showed the whole group distinctly; and two men with torches, were evidently obeying signs, for no words could be heard, to fire the houses.

The sergeant, however, had got his aim perfectly. 'Fire!' he cried, and the men ran to the parapet of the bastion to see the effect. The bursting of the shell hid the object for a moment; but an instant after, they saw the noble beast totter and fall, and there was a heap, from the bottom of the howdah, flung out on the grass.

At the same time the guard fired a volley from the bastion below, and perhaps with some effect, for the distance was within easy Enfield range; but there was no need to fire again. Every man on the lawn had fled, and the now decreasing blaze of the conflagration left the lawn in darkness.

'I hot 'im, boys, so I did,' cried the sergeant exultingly, as he saw the effects of his shot. 'Ah! be me sowl, but you're the best ould girl I iver handled,' and he patted the breech of the howitzer; 'an' I hope yez seen it too, Mistress Brandon? Bedad, it's she that doesn't faint, lads, at the crack of a gun; and if it waren't clane agin orders, we'd give yez three cheers, maam, so we would.'

Yes, Seeta had seen the shot; and early in the morning, Buldeo and Luchmun Singh ran down to the lawn, and saw the bloated, shattered body of Máma Juneela lying beside the dead elephant and its driver. The jackals and hyenas had

already been busy with it, while vultures sat grimly on the trees around, waiting their turn.

'I wish it had been Azráel Pánde,' said Buldeo, as they took the gold ornaments from the woman, and a heavy bag of money from her waist; 'but his time may come.'

CHAPTER VIII.

'THE STILLING OF THE STORM.'

Throughout the night, the frightful tumult continued. The evil rabble which always follows a military camp threw off all restraint, and plundered at their will, sacking the deserted bungalows of officers, or the shops of traders in the bazaars, and in many places causing fresh fires to break out. Shrieks and cries came from all quarters to the fort: but it was impossible to render aid to sufferers, or indeed to take any measures for local tranquillity until the morning should break, and show what could be done. The Brigadier's precautions had often been sneered at, but the issue had proved the wisdom of his foresight. The outbreak might be renewed at any time since the first bursting of the storm; and had there been no preparation, what could have been done in an emergency like the present, with no provisions laid in, and no quarters prepared? Who could have surmised that one regiment

would be faithful? Had both suddenly risen when all were off their guard, and Christian men, women, and children were scattered in their houses over the wide cantonment, many must inevitably have perished; and even the English soldiers might have been overwhelmed, or forced to retire from Noorpoor. If the native troops had then seized the fort, who could have driven them out of it? or if such a measure as an attack on it had even become necessary, how enormous would have been the sacrifice—how precarious the success! Never in their existence, perhaps, had those in the fort felt more perfect security, or had been more grateful for protection.

One by one the officers of the regiments that had mutinied, dropped in and told their tale: how the commander and the adjutant, and a few native officers, had gone from company to company in the lines, and adjured the men to be steady; how they had been jeered, taunted, and threatened, until the regiment formed into a mass on the parade, and marched away. And how, strange to say, none of the English officers had been hurt, though at the last, to drive them off, the men fired—if not at them, at least near enough to them to give a significant hint of what was intended if they should persevere in attempting to hinder

their designs. As to Captain Hobson, he, too, had appealed earnestly to his men, and as he thought at first with some effect; but as they wavered, one man, a notoriously violent character, had suddenly ridden at him, and wounded him severely in the chest and shoulder. Others were following up the action of their comrade: when seeing that they could barely save their lives, he had called to Temple, and escaped as I have related.

'Those two shells, and the loyal —th, saved us,' said Hobson, as he was having his wound dressed, and was telling his story; 'but when my horse was staggering from loss of blood, and we saw the regiment forming, we thought it was all up with us, till we knew their officers were with them; then only we felt we were safe.'

And never were gladder sounds heard in Noorpoor than the bugles of the —th, as at daylight the regiment marched steadily upon the parade ground, from the cover of the gardens beyond, headed by their brave commander and other officers. The Brigadier, and many who were with him, hurried down from the fort to give them a hearty reception, and hear how the night had passed with them, and truly it had been an exciting one. They had beaten the recreant regiment out of the limits of the cantonment,

and inflicted some loss upon it as long as there was light; but when the moon set, they could see no longer, and it was evident from the shouts of men, the neighing of horses, and the clashing of elephant bells, at a little distance, that they had effected a junction with the Nawab's forces, which had been drawn up to receive them. The faithful regiment had suffered but little loss; one English officer had been slightly wounded by a bayonet thrust in his arm; but none of the rest had been hurt, and among the men, the casualties were slight, considering the nature of the service they had performed. Never was there a fitter opportunity for reward, and the Brigadier, on his own responsibility, distributed a month's extra pay to all present through the night, with an immense increase to his popularity. Some of the men, however, had gone with the mutineers. On the other hand, more than an equal number of the faithless regiment, with several of its native officers, had remained, who met their comrades in undress, and implored to be received into their ranks. Nor were the cavalry all gone, for nearly a hundred men and some native officers, came from their lines and submitted themselves to the Brigadier's orders. Thus Noorpoor became actually stronger than before; and the positive gain

by the flight of the disaffected was a relief to all, beyond conception.

Cyril Brandon had been doing his duty too, in another quarter. After he passed through the gate he made the best of his way to the police lines, where he found Noble with the men, and was welcomed with a shout of delight. But it was too late to save the Kucherry, and the treasury. A guard of the mutinied regiment had been upon it that day: and at the signal, they had at once fired the building, loaded the treasure, fortunately of no considerable amount, on the tumbrils, and made off towards Futtehpoor. As this was beyond doubt, Cyril and his companions betook themselves to the gaol, which was full of prisoners in the last degree of excitement. Fortunately it had been in charge of police only, who were faithful, and violence within had been repressed. An attempt had been made by the mutineers to dislodge the guard, but they had resisted stoutly, as the bodies of several dead Sepoys, lying near the gate attested.

The varying nature of the night's engagement, prevented any renewal of the attack, and Mr. Brandon's reinforcement of some fifty men, placed the security of the building beyond ques-

tion. All night long, therefore, he and Mr. Noble had watched, not knowing what was occurring, till nearly daylight; when two of the Sikhs who had volunteered as spies, brought the welcome news that the mutineers, with the Nawab's forces, were retiring upon Futtehpoor.

Meanwhile, poor Seeta had passed a very woeful night, for of Cyril there were no tidings. She had herself watched the tower whence the events I have recorded had been witnessed, and where she saw Mr. Mostyn: but not her husband. Then she had sought Mr. Mostyn, and enquired of him; but he could tell her nothing but that Cyril had been with them, and he had suddenly missed him; and he went with the distracted girl everywhere he could think of to seek him, but he was not to be found. Could he have gone to the Kucherry with Noble, and both perished there? For Mr. Mostyn had seen the flames of the building soon after the mutiny had broken out. To ascertain anything definite during the night was impossible: and, making over Seeta to his wife's and Grace's care, he went to renew his watch with the Brigadier and the rest on the high cavalier; and as he looked through his glass at the —— as they crossed the parade after daylight, and saw that neither Cyril nor Mr.

Noble were with them, his heart sank within him. What could he tell Seeta?

It had been a hard, a weary night for Seeta to bear. 'Why did he leave me alone?' 'Why did he go?' 'Will they bring him to me?' 'Oh, let me go and seek him!' Such piteous cries, mingled with choking sobs and prayers, neither her two friends nor good Mrs. Pratt could soothe; for in truth they all feared the worst, and could only console Seeta to the best of their ability and pray with her. So she sat, tearless and silent, with a white, scared face, only moaning a little now and then, but patient, though scarcely understanding what was said to her. They said afterwards, as they thought then, that had Cyril's body been brought in, she would have died, without speaking.

And perhaps she would; but there was joy in store for her. We know that at daylight Buldeo and Luchmun Singh had gone down to the house, and they had not returned. Seeta, who had been restless in the octagon room, had gone up to the terrace overhead, and Mrs. Mostyn followed her, for the fresh morning air was delicious. They saw Seeta looking earnestly to the lawn, and presently, the figures of the men moving about. Then Seeta had descended quickly to her oratory, and before they knew

what she was doing they saw her, dressed in her boy's clothes, hurry down to the gate, and run down the slope, accompanied by the rest of her Rahtores, who had been on guard with the English soldiers. Mrs. Mostyn and Grace were now in the utmost alarm; but who could recall her? Buldeo and his companion had met her as she descended. Not heeding the ghastly heap on the lawn, or the dead lying about, she cried to them all, 'If ye are men, come and look for your lord, with me,' and the party pressed on.

We know, however, that Cyril was quite safe; and that he could depend upon the police. So, leaving the brave old Darogah at his post, he thought he might as well see what had happened at or near his house, for he had heard the report of guns from the tower. I do not think he was even in any particular hurry: and as Seeta turned round the house from the lawn, she first saw Muff, who came barking and leaping on her, and then Cyril, strolling along leisurely, with a cigar in his mouth.

'Why did you leave me, O why did you leave me?' she cried as she touched his feet. She could say no more, for he thought she would have fainted from excess of joy; and he supported her into the cottage, and laid her down upon the divan,

while the old Brahmin and his wife, who had gone down with Buldeo, brought her water.

'O, I will thank God! I will thank God, Cyril,' she said, when she could speak, 'who has saved you all. I will go to him as a little child, and he will not be angry with me, he will not turn me away. But do not leave me again, Cyril; never, never leave me. I should have died last night when the tumult continued, but for my prayers. O never leave me again! If you go, even into battle, take me; I will not fear; but alone I am a coward indeed. Promise me this, Cyril; O my darling, do not deny it!'

Cyril knew his wife spoke the truth. 'No, I will never leave you again,' he said fervently. 'There may be rough work, but you are best with me. I could not help myself yesterday, for there was no time to call you, and indeed I was quite safe.'

Then he went out to give directions for the lawn to be cleared of what lay there, and Buldeo showed him what remained of the horrible woman who had come for Seeta. It was with a thankful heart that Cyril knew his wife to be safe.

'Does she know of this?' he asked.

'No, sir,' replied Buldeo. 'We did not like to tell her, but Luchmuh Singh and I washed the

ornaments, and have put them away safely above. What could have brought the Mánia Sahiba here, sir?'

'Her own folly and wickedness, I suppose,' said Mr. Brandon, looking up to the tower. 'She did not know that you were watching her?' Cyril did not choose to gratify Buldeo's curiosity in regard to the woman. When he returned to Seeta, he asked her whether she knew who had been killed; but she did not. 'I was too anxious then to care or think who was in the howdah,' she replied. 'I thought it was one of the Nawáb's officers, and that they would burn down the bungalow and my cottage; but the sergeant prevented that; and I saw the elephant fall, and something thrown out of the howdah. What was it?'

'Mánia Jumeela,' he answered; 'so be thankful that you have one enemy the less.' 'How true the dancing girl was, Seeta; we must reward her somehow.'

'Yes,' she said absently, 'we must reward her.' But she was shuddering at the horrible danger she had escaped. Who could have helped her had she remained in her cottage; who could have helped Mrs. Mostyn or Grace? All of them must have perished miserably, or been reserved for a

fate far worse than death; and how blessed was safety under such thoughts!

There was to be a special thanksgiving service by the chaplain on the ensuing Sunday, in the hall of audience, the 'Dewán-i-Am,' usually the public room of the soldiers, which was to be specially arranged for the occasion; and as all the Christians of Noorpoor were in the fort, it was preferable to have the service there, to attempting to use the church, which, though entire, had been wrecked by the camp plunderers, and the seats and altar damaged.

Seeta knew that this ceremony was to be performed, and very timidly she asked Cyril whether she would be admitted. 'Suppose I should go,' she said with a wistful face. 'Many native Christian women will go, and I could be with them; no one would know me.'

"'And why not go with Mrs. Pratt, and the Mostyns?' he asked. 'Go! of course you can go. Our churches are open to all; and where prayers are publicly read, the place is God's temple, for the time. I am sure Mrs. Pratt and your friends will take you, and if they don't, I will. O Seeta, I am so glad that you can think with us now.'

She said nothing, but buried her head in his breast, and sobbed like a little child, a weary

child perhaps, seeking what had not yet been fully developed to her. 'O, if you will but take me, Cyril, just for once, that I may pray to the God who brought you safe to me, I should be quite happy. Indeed, I would not make Him angry, for I would pray to Him only as a child, and I know he is very pitiful.' When Cyril told them, dear old Mrs. Pratt and Mrs. Mostyn and Grace said Seeta should sit with them, and do just as she liked; nor did they think her less a Hindoo than ever; but they felt the girl's high aims of gratitude and love in all their force, and were content to wait their effects.

Seeta joined Mrs. Mostyn and Grace in their own rooms on Sunday morning, and Mrs. Mostyn, as she welcomed her with a kiss, gave her, in her own name and Grace's, a pretty prayer-book, bound in ivory plates, with a clear bold type. None of them could speak very much, and Seeta was trembling, but not excited. She was simply dressed in a white muslin saree, without ornaments of any kind; and as they entered the hall, Seeta put aside her sandals, as she always did, and walked up to their seat with bare feet.

The hall was a fine specimen of Pathán Gothic, the groins of its arches rising to meet octagons which supported the small domes that formed

the ceiling. All the principal portions of the walls and roof were profusely decorated with arabesques in stucco, and had been now washed and cleared, from the bats and swallows' nests which had before disfigured them. The open apertures of the clerestory let a flood of light upon the centre, which fell in long slanting rays. Below, the wall was solid, but broken with bold niches and recesses in archways: and but for the light above, the interior would have been gloomy. On the daïs at the end, where the king, or local ruler, had been wont to sit of old, a carpet was spread; and there was a table with a pure white cloth, and the silver vessels of the sacrament upon it: a slightly elevated reading desk had been put up at one side, and there were rows of forms for the soldiers, and chairs for the officers and their wives.

When the group entered the church, and proceeded to their seats, we may well believe that the presence of Seeta attracted no little attention: and there was a good deal of indignant sniffing on the part of some ladies present, at the unwarrantable intrusion, as they expressed it, of a 'black woman,' a heathen, into a place of Christian worship; but Seeta sat between Mrs. Mostyn and Grace, somewhat retired, and covered her face with her saree; nor did she feel nervous, for kind looks from Mrs.

Hill and Lucy Home, and Mrs. Pratt, not to mention the sympathy of her friends, and the hearty approval of Mrs. Mostyn and her husband, gave her a calm confidence she had little expected to possess. I think if she had followed her own instincts she would have gone forward at once, and fallen prostrate before the table, and there prayed in her own simple fashion; but nobody she saw did that, and she followed the service which she had often read, in a humble reverent spirit, with her heart swelling with gratitude in a kind of silent ecstacy, which she had never before experienced; and, at the prayer for peace and deliverance, in time of war and tumult, and perhaps most of all at that supplication in the litany to Him 'that despiseth not the sighing of a contrite heart,' she could hardly restrain her emotion. Perhaps she could not follow all the service, for its length, and the changes in it, bewildered her; but she saw that passages had already been marked for her by the loving friends who best knew her thoughts—knew how full her heart was of devotion that as yet she could only think, but not express; and they watched the silent soft tears, dropping gently from her eyes, while her reverent glances were now and then upraised, and her lips moved to her thoughts. They all noticed, too, that by chance,

one of the rays from the clerestory, fell on her, and surrounded her as with a glory all the time she sat.

It was a fine service too, for the church harmonium had been saved, and brought up, and the Canticles and the Psalms of the day were chanted. Mrs. Pratt played the instrument, and some of the soldiers and their wives formed a strong steady choir. Then the sweet music, and the blended voices ascended among the domes and fretted ornaments of the roof, and multiplied the sound till the effect to Seeta was well nigh overpowering; and there was one hymn which she knew, and in which Grace whispered to her to join, and Seeta did so, her full rich voice being heard over many around.

Perhaps of good Mr. Pratt's sermon, Seeta did not understand much, for indeed that excellent divine's delivery was none of the plainest, and was monotonous besides; but others understood it, practical and seasonable as it was, warning all to be ready should they be called, reminding them of those who had already suffered violent deaths elsewhere, and had comforted themselves like true Christians, and exhorting all present, especially the thoughtless among them, to live in humble reliance on Him whose mercies had been already so signally proved.

When he had finished, most perhaps went away; but there were many that remained for the after service, and in their turn, went to the table and took the bread and the wine. Could Seeta have gone with Grace and prayed there, she would; but here was a gulf fixed between them, which Seeta could not pass, and she could only watch the ceremony with earnest interest and eyes dimmed with tears.

Perhaps the wonder and admiration which blended with the consciousness that she had attended Christian worship and thanksgiving, had prevented her feeling to its utmost extent, the impressive ceremony she had witnessed. As she reached home, she went into her little oratory, took the ashes from the sacred fire as usual, and touched her forehead reverently with them, and then prostrated herself before her little altar. There was only one silver image of Krishna on it that her grandfather and Aunt Ella had confided to her with earnest injunctions for its worship; and now it seemed to blink at her sleepily with its sapphire eyes, and she cried to it in the words of her own liturgy which she had by heart. But after a time those prayers seemed to her cold and comfortless; and instead of them there came up involuntarily in her heart, the Christian wail,

'O God, merciful Father, thy despisest not the sighing of a contrite heart, nor the desires of such as be sorrowful,' and she felt that, through God's mercy, 'the craft and subtilty of the devil or man had indeed, for her, been brought to nought,' and that she was safe—safe from the horrible violence that had been intended. And I think, as the Hindoo girl rose and sought her husband, to tell him of her gratitude, that there were few in Noorpoor that day who felt more deeply than Seeta, how merciful the Lord had been to all.

CHAPTER IX.

SEETA'S KINSFOLK.

With what agony the old banker of Shah Gunje and Aunt Ella had heard the common rumours of the mutiny at Noorpoor, I dare not attempt to describe; for it was reported that all the English had perished—that the soldiers and their officers, with all the ladies and children under their protection, had sallied from the fort, and surrounded by both the infantry regiments and the cavalry, and by the guns and forces of the Nawab, had fought bravely for a whole day, but had been slain in heaps; and that by the evening, none had survived.

Coupling this with the results at Jhansy and Cawnpoor, which were known to be true, and had been written to him circumstantially by his correspondents, Narendra gave the fullest credence to what he had heard, and was bowed to the earth by grief. As to poor Aunt Ella, she threw dust and ashes on her head, and sat moaning piteously,

refusing to be comforted, and helplessly rocking herself to and fro, rejecting all food. For if the news as regarded the English was horrible, that in regard to Seeta was still worse. She, it was stated, with a young English lady, the Judge's sister, had been carried off by the Nawab, and placed in his zenana; that Seeta had been immediately made a Mahomedan, and forced to eat cow's flesh, and that after hers and the English lady's seclusion, no more had been heard of them. No wonder poor Aunt Ella was like to die, as the news was brought to her by her servants; and even the priest could give no cheering hope or comfort. If it had happened, the catastrophe was too terrible, and the agony of grief too profound for human comfort; and indeed Narendra and his friend thought that, were the dear old lady to expire in one of her frantic paroxysms of suffering, it would be a merciful release to her. 'Ram! Ram! Ram!' was suspended or forgotten; and in its stead there were cries for 'Seeta!' O, better she were dead; better a thousand times she had perished with her husband, than live a polluted life as a Mahomedan slave.'

Were then the English really to perish, or had they already perished everywhere in the north? In the south indeed, all was quiet and safe as yet;

but the banker's letters from Poona and Hyderabad, were by no means satisfactory. At Nagpoor the retainers of the old Bhóslays were conspiring to re-establish the family; and even in Bombay there was alarm and mistrust. When I say, all this bad news and a great deal more was constantly arriving, and, as he believed for a time, Noorpoor had fallen, Narendra, well-wisher as he was to the English, might truly despair. He had not a word with which he could combat the new open-mouthed rejoicings of the evil-minded at Shah Gunje; nor the advice of specious friends, that he should at once wind up his affairs and proceed to Benares, where he would be safe; but the old man was yet steadfast and brave, and remained. He had no doubt, in his own mind, that all the present evil would pass away in time, and that when the monsoon ceased, the English from the south and west, would advance and drive the rebels from the prey on which they were now gorging themselves; but of all in Shah Gunje, though many had hopes, there were few perhaps, except Wamun Bhut, who could think with Narendra. So the old man had been hopeful and even confident till the reports from Noorpoor came, which broke him down, for the time, entirely. Cyril Brandon dead, and his darling child

carried away into pollution! I try to realise what the intensity of the sufferings of these two loving hearts must have been under this conviction, while it lasted, and am beaten back by my own thoughts, which cannot follow theirs.

Nor was this the only trouble which came upon the Goldsmith's house. As he heard of the mutiny at Noorpoor, with all the exaggerations which went to Shah Gunje, Rajah Hurpál Singh, setting aside his habitual indolence, saw it was time to strike in. Some Sepoy mutineers from distant stations, had joined him in numbers sufficient for his purpose. His own levies were ready for plunder, and he advanced at once to secure his share of the Noorpoor Province. It was a scramble in which the strongest and most active would get most; and Shah Gunje was not likely to be overlooked. With Ram Das, the Rajah had carried on a secret correspondence for some time past; and that wily person had already marked those from whom the largest contributions could be best levied. Among these it was not likely that Narendra would escape; and when the Rajah with a force of several thousand men and artillery, suddenly attacked Shah Gunje, putting the few police that guarded it to flight or to the sword, and hanging the unfortunate

Tehsildar, who was the head local authority, Ram Das accompanied the conqueror, and assessed the contributions to be levied.

It was by no means his policy to exact too much from Narendra, for he had another and more effectual object in view, that of seizing the whole of his business and property for himself; and the Rajah's demand on the banker for ten thousand rupees was at once paid, partly in cash, and partly in bills on Benares and Mirzapoor, which were easily negotiable. Perhaps if Ram Das had known of the banker's secret treasure vault, neither he, nor the Rajah, would have let him off so easily; but he did not know, and none of the banker's establishment knew it except the Rahtores, now absent at Noorpoor, whose fidelity nothing could corrupt. Nevertheless Narendra was far from easy, and dreaded the unscrupulous character of the man in whose power he now remained.

If Ram Das could not discover the treasure, he could at least trace outstanding balances, and debts due from persons around the district; he could also discover the condition of accounts at Mirzapoor, Oomrawuttee, Bombay, Poona, and other agencies; and it was a miserable piece of ingratitude in one of Narendra's most trusted clerks, to direct Ram Das where to find books and papers

relative to these matters. For Narendra himself was now a prisoner in his own house, inhabiting Seeta's old room, where the memories of her added perpetually to his other griefs; and Aunt Ella had been removed to one of the rooms in the upper corridor, on an occasion when, roused to fury by the conduct of Ram Das, and for the time forgetting her miseries, she had assailed him with reproaches, and abuse; declared that he was murdering her brother as he had murdered Hurgo Das, and that she would have her revenge on him when the English returned. What the reply of Ram Das was, I need not record, certainly neither temperate or decent; and in spite of the old lady's sanctity, she was taken upstairs struggling, and kicking violently, but helpless against her detestable persecutor. Worse than this, the sacred fire which she had tended since she came to her brother's house was allowed to go out, and could not be lighted again without a special ceremony; and thus the cup of the dear old lady's misery was full; so full, that her mind was, for the time, a strange chaos and jumble, which affected her speech in a very peculiar and distressing manner, and rendered her quite insensible to solace, even the little that her brother—for Wamun

Bhut's visits were now interdicted—could afford her.

There were others too in the town as badly off as Narendra, or perhaps worse. Small bankers and money dealers, whose means were narrow, weavers, provision dealers, copper-smiths and brass-smiths, grain merchants, cloth merchants, in short all trades that ministered to the social wants of the place; farmers, landholders who lived there, and generally all persons from whom contributions could be exacted, even of the smallest amount, were forced to give them. I say forced, for the Rajah and his courtiers sitting in the public court of the Tehsildar who had been hanged, amused themselves for several days with their own peculiar methods of ingenious extortion: that is, by laying out people in the sun with their hands and feet tied to tent pegs, piling stones on their chests, and ——, but perhaps I need not specify all the modes of torture which, as the people could not help thinking, did not exist in the days of the English. There were not many Mahomedans in the town, but with them, some of the Hindoos had a long existing feud, and now was the time to pay off old scores. So the Rajah, who hated Mahomedans, sent for a pig and had its throat cut in the Mosque, and its blood

smeared on the arches and pulpit, and th
wholly defiled. Nor, as the Mahomedans t
had the English ever done anything lik
Why, it was not many months ago, sinc
Brandon had given a grant in aid of their sc
and with this it was to be enlarged and new bo
bought; and he had examined the boys and
given them a feast of sweetmeats, because they had
pleased him; and those things were not forgotten.
But they were all helpless now.

Nor were the villages round Shah Gunje much
better off than the country town. Ram Das and
his agents were particularly active as revenue
collectors, and there was no escaping the screw
that was put on for payments in advance, of the
coming year's collections. And but too many
suffered heavily by this, being obliged to sell their
cattle and family jewels, under their value, to
extortionate money dealers. Well, I need not
perhaps tell of more miseries; but the anarchy and
disorganisation of the rural districts was as com-
plete as if there never had been any English. It
was a practical return to the rule of old times.

> The good old rule, the simple plan,
> That those do take who have the power,
> And those do keep who can.

And the wonder was, if it was wonderful, that the

ige was the effect of but a few days. And ,rauders, plunderers, and thieves without num-er, sprang up in all directions, and there was no more peace abroad.

But peace did come to the banker and Aunt Ella after some days; a peace so entire, and so blissful, that all the other troubles they had suffered, and were enduring, went by them as on the wind. The very day after the thanksgiving service at Noorpoor, Baldeo and one of the Rah tores, accompanied by one of Narendra's treasure carriers, who was with the agent at Noorpoor, left that city with special dispatches for the banker; and other bankers of Noorpoor availed themselves of the opportunity to forward letters to their own correspondents at Shah Gunje. Seeta, indeed, would have written at once after the mutiny to her grandfather, to assure him of her safety; but one of the Nawab's first acts had been to stop all the posts, to drive away the runners, and to prevent the garrison of Noorpoor having any communication with the world outside; and thus Seeta was obliged to wait till the agent considered the dispatch of the men tolerably safe. All of them knew secret paths to Shah Gunje through the woods and forests, the inhabitants of which they did not ordinarily fear; but now, every man's

hand was against his neighbour, and the utmost circumspection was necessary. But in the end, the intelligence and courage of the men triumphed. Their last resting place had been the lonely Temple cave at which this tale opened, and it was with the utmost caution that they entered Shah Gunje in the evening. Buldeo, not knowing the secret ways of the house, was sorely puzzled how to deliver his precious packet; but at length, one of the women servants who knew him, led him up from the back yard by a small staircase; and with a cry of delight, he laid the parcel at the old man's feet. 'They are well,' he exclaimed, 'well and safe, not one of the English have been harmed, and they are stronger at Noorpoor than ever!'

Narendra had looked up, wistfully at first, from the bed on which he was lying. He did not know Buldeo's face, or had forgotten it: but he remembered the high cracked voice, at the trial, and starting up he received the packet without speaking, and opened it with trembling hands. Then, too, Aunt Ella, now far more gaunt than before, hearing a strange voice, tottered in, supporting herself on her staff: and when Buldeo touched her feet reverently, and pointed to Narendra, she saw that he had a letter in his hand, and was trembling very much, yet his face seemed full of triumphant

joy. As he saw her, he stretched both his arms out to her; 'Ella! sister! they live,' he cried, 'they live! come and listen.' But the revulsion and the joy were too much for the dear, loving old heart; it seemed to stand still, as her features quivered, and she would have fallen to the ground, but for the strong arms of Baldeo, who supported her, and laid her gently down.

It was long before she recovered, and indeed at one time they all thought—for her women had come to her—that she had died; but her breath came to her by gasps, and when she had swallowed a little water, she looked up imploringly, and raised herself, though she could not speak, and was shivering. 'Dead? All dead?' she gasped.

'Not dead, Ella,' said Narendra, 'nor yet harmed,' and he spoke very slowly that she might understand gradually, 'but safe, sister, safe! Look! here is Seeta's letter; here is Mr. Brandon's. Look! O! how shall we thank the Gods.'

Dear Aunt Ella! It was only very gradually that the blessed truth, the assurance of safety, broke upon her mind. She wept; she laughed; she put the letters to her breast and hugged them; to her eyes, which now rained tears, and covered them with kisses. She stretched out her arms to her brother, and fell upon his neck and sobbed, and wept and

laughed by turns as though she were distraught. O! joy that had come to them both! so full, so complete, so indescribable that it were profanation to attempt to define it, for we know what they had endured even for those few short days, which had well nigh wrung life out of both their hearts.

And when they were calmer, Narendra read the precious letters they had received, again and again; for Seeta's was full and descriptive, and Brandon's tender and grateful that all were safe. "Take good heart," he had written in conclusion, "we are not only safe but more powerful here than before, now all are loyal and true. Tell this to everyone in Shah Gunje, and be thankful with us, that the storm of 1857 has passed over us without injury. Soon, perhaps, we may have forces to act against rebels, and the old peace will ensue." Nor did they doubt his hearty, cheering words, and they seemed to ring in their ears as though the writer himself had been there with them and spoken them. All night they sat with Baldeo, and heard what had happened, and how Mûna Jumeela had died; how bravely the —th had fought, and how safe and strong the fort was, with the English sojers in it. As the day broke Aunt Ella could no longer restrain herself; new life and new strength seemed to have come to her, and without telling her

brother, who had fallen into a sweet sleep, she took her staff and went to the Temple as was her former wont; and Wamun Bhut found her prostrate before the image in the sanctum, weeping, but crying out her thanks, and, after a while, heard all the glad tale from her lips. When she returned, she found Narendra writing answers to the letters, for Bildeo was anxious to be gone, and had betaken himself for the day, to his hiding place. 'He would come at night,' he said, 'for the dispatches.' As to Aunt Ella, I think the old ejaculations recommenced with unusual fervour, and as she saw the tally on her wall increase, she was more than ever convinced of the favour she had obtained from 'Ram.'

Meanwhile at Futtehpoor there had been a good deal of trouble and excitement. The ex-Havaldar Goor Bux, in his capacity of 'Colonel,' had, under his professional knowledge of guns and gunnery, furbished up several of the Nuwab's old cannon, long disused and rusty, but still tolerably serviceable if leisurely fired. He dare not interfere with the mutineers, who were often at variance with each other, one party pressing an immediate march to join the Nana, or the Ranee of Jhansy; the other admitting the wisdom of the ex-Havaldar's advice to stay where they were and move

only after the rains were over, and he promised them enough to do if they would stay.

As to the Nawab, he was but as a straw floating hither and thither on the stream. He was out of favour with both his wives, though one was relenting. He had lost Máma Juneela, his chief confidant and adviser; he had not secured Missy Mostyn, nor been able to give Seeta to Azráel Paudé, who, after the excitement of the mutiny and his bitter disappointment that no English blood had gone to the 'Mother,' had resumed his old incantations, and rarely appeared above ground; and when he did, was moody and savage, and with difficulty restrained by his associates. Some men of the mutinied regiment had volunteered to go into Noorpoor and stir up the loyal regiment; but two had been detected and seized by the men of the —th, another had been apprehended by the police hiding in the town, and these were summarily tried, and blown away from guns, after the prevailing custom of the time.

When the 'Colonel's' preparations were complete, he marched out from Futtehpoor with the Nawab's forces, and tried to establish a siege of the fort; but he succeeded very badly with the old guns and hammered shot, and the garrison were always active and vigilant, and well protected by

the guns of the fort and the cover of the station, and occasionally made vigorous sorties against the earthworks which represented the enemy's batteries, and on one occasion captured one of the guns which the 'Colonel' was not able to get away in time. Thus, therefore, constant skirmishes were going on, in which Brandon and Mr. Noble and their stout police took an active part, defending their special post of the gaol, for which purpose they were amply sufficient. Nor was Seeta ever left behind now. No matter how great the exposure, or the fatigue, the active girl shared all; and the care of her person became, as might be expected, a point of honour to the men. Very often the English soldiers and the loyal —th asked to be allowed to follow up the rebels to Futtehpoor, and even to take the place from which such constant annoyance was experienced; but the Brigadier was cautious, and was quite satisfied by their conduct in protecting the fort, and the cantonments.

But the Nawab thought he was wasting time in these ineffectual attempts to take Noorpoor, and when Rajah Hurpál Singh's successes and heavy collections of money were reported to him, he resolved to act vigorously. Sending the Moulvee Sahib in one direction, he took another himself,

driving out what few police they found, establishing their own agents, and issuing proclamations that in virtue of the Nawab's appointment from the Emperor, he had become proprietor of the Noorpoor district, and all men were to obey him. Perhaps these proceedings are not worth record, for they afforded little contrast with the effects of those of Rajah Hurpál Singh, already mentioned: and if the Nawab, in some slight degree, was more careful of the people than the Rajah, in essentials perhaps there was not much to choose between them, or the anarchy that they created.

If it had not been for the constant skirmishes, and the occasional harmless whirr of a rough round shot over their heads, the garrison of Noorpoor would have been even duller than they actually were. No news came from without, and even the native merchants' dispatches, of which Baba Sahib always collected the particulars, had grown dull and unimportant. Either their correspondents had become accustomed to the change, or there were events in progress of which they dared not write. The soldiers were, perhaps, the most content, for they had books, cricket, and all the games and amusements that could be devised for them, and they even got up a play and concert, at which our dear Mrs. Mostyn and Grace, and

Cyril, and Captain Hobson, who looked very interesting with his left arm in a sling, assisted skilfully and well, and at which Seeta was present in a quiet corner.

As to the rest of the society, perhaps, the less I say about it the better; people penned up as they were, are liable to petty jealousies, fluctuations of parties and opinions of each other, which even a common danger does not prevent; and I think that our set was the happiest, because it did not trouble itself with its neighbours' affairs, and held its own with modest dignity, and courtesy to all.

CHAPTER X.

'FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.'

LIFE in the fort was gradually becoming very irksome; and even the excitement of occasional skirmishes had passed away, for the Nawab and his army had been making a triumphant progress through the district, and were at a considerable distance, with no apparent intention of returning to Futtehpoor. He was watching the actions of Rajah Hurpál Singh, whose retainers had attacked a party of his levies, and the indignation, both of the Nawab and the Moulvee, was at its height when the priests of the Mosque at Shah Gunje came to the camp with lighted torches in their hands, and wearing grave clothes, while they threw ashes on their heads, and demanded justice for the defilement of the Mosque at Shah Gunje. 'You are the representative of the King of Kings,' said the chief delegate, 'who has entrusted all of us to you; and we look for justice on the Kafirs who have done this wrong. In the time of the

English such tyranny would have been impossible; and last year they even gave us an ample donation. Come and avenge this insult to the Faith, else we will beg our way to Dehly, and tell our injuries to the King of Kings! Dohai! Dohai!'

The Nawab was sorely distressed and puzzled. When such things had happened in his own estate, as they had done, he had left matters to adjust themselves, or had only interfered if he felt strong enough. But this had been the deliberate insult of a rival—one with whom the old feud was not dead—one against whose power his warlike progenitors had done stout battle. Was it come to his turn now to do the same? Certainly, he could not avoid or evade the quarrel which had been forced upon him; and yet the commanders in his army were Hindoos. Colonel Goor Bux and Azrtel Pandé were Brahmins; the Soobadar Major of the —st, whom he dare not dismiss or offend, was a Brahmin also. Most of the Sepoys who had mutinied were Brahmins and Rajpoots; all likely to join Hurpál Singh if they had any temptation to do so, or to go to the Ranee of Jhansy. And if they went, what was to become of him? His own local levies, undisciplined and worthless, he well knew could be beaten any day by the English troops at Noorpoor. Futteh-

poor might be taken, and he himself become a wretched fugitive. All this passed like a flash before his troubled mind, while the delegates from Shah Gunje without his tent, were waving their torches in the bright sunlight, and throwing handfuls of dust into the air, crying 'Dohai! Dohai!' and calling upon God and the Prophet for justice!

The Moulvee—who had been sitting in the Nawab's inner tent drawing up proclamations, and writing eloquent dispatches to the King of Kings, giving florid descriptions of how the province had been taken possession of in his Majesty's name—hearing the tumult, now came forward, and soon learned the truth; and his ardent zeal for the Faith became suddenly inflamed.

'Can you hesitate, Dil Khan,' he exclaimed, 'as to what you should do, with the cries of these true believers ringing in your ears? March at once on Shah Gunje, and exterminate these infidels: or give me some of your men, who will fight with me for the Faith, and let me go. Deen! Deen!' shouted, throwing down his turban and [illegible] into the agitated crowd bare-headed, [illegible] right arm upraised, and his pock[illegible] aloft. 'Deen! Deen! let tho[illegible] me for the Faith, swear on

rather than justice should fail. Let us away, my sons, and revenge this insult!'

Nor was his fanatical cry without effect. What true Moslem present could refuse it? So, from all quarters of the camp, the Mussulman warriors rushed forward, and the men of the cavalry became infected, and in a short time the Moulvee had a thousand fanatics around him, to whom, standing on a low mound of earth, he delivered a short sermon or address on the delights in paradise which awaited any who might become martyrs; and was answered by hoarse cries of 'Ameen! Ameen!'

To check this tumult, the Nawab was perfectly helpless; and perhaps he regarded, with a secret pleasure, not only the absence of the Moulvee, but his employment in a dangerous duty which he himself had chosen. The recovery of Shah Gunje, and the district of which Hurpál Singh had possessed himself, was a most important measure in regard to the consolidation of his conquest; and promise of an estate to the saintly man, should ...ceed, added much to the fervid zeal by ...was actuated. I need not, perhaps, ... which followed. Suffice it to say, ...ght, the surprise of Shah Gunje ... Hurpál Singh, indeed, was

not there; but his lieutenant was taken and hanged, his men routed and many slain, and in the excitement of victory, the fierce Moslem fanatics slew a cow in Wamun Bhut's pretty temple, overturned the idol, smeared its face with blood, and defiled the place as completely as the Mosque had been defiled before. Then the Moulvee issued a proclamation that no Hindoo was to appear with caste marks on his forehead, that bells must not be rung, nor conch shells blown, and that on any breach of these orders, every temple in the town would be blown up. I am almost tempted to translate the holy man's report of the victory to the Nawab, which was drawn up in his most grandiose and scholarly manner; but the quotations of Persian and Arabic are too numerous, and perhaps my readers would not be interested in so notable an example of Mahomedan fanaticism in its worst form.

If the capture of Shah Gunje did not directly concern characters which belong to this history, it might very well have been omitted altogether. Even now, I notice the event only as an effect of the times; how religious animosities, which had so long slumbered, awoke in many localities, and entailed terrible sufferings and indignities upon the people—becoming prominent and distressing parts

of the anarchy which prevailed. If the excesses of Hurpál Singh's soldiers had been great, those of the Moulvee's were worse; and the wily Ram Das, making a handsome 'nuzzer' or offering to that great person, was allowed to share his confidence, and direct exactions as before. Thus, the situation of all at Shah Gunje, and the riotous conduct of the excited Mahomedan soldiers, and the Moulvee's intolerance and exaction, became more and more unendurable.

Meanwhile, as I remarked at the commencement of this chapter, life in the fort at Noorpoor was becoming more and more tiresome. Party spirit, to some extent, had risen higher, and all kinds of amusements were obstructed by small jealousies. There were days when all dined together at the mess, where those whom it pleased to do so, saw favouritism in cuts of mutton, wings or legs of fowls, and special bones in the curries. Or, if they dined at home, matrons declared that the meat grew worse and worse, and the distribution of joints was shamefully partial and exclusive. Such small discontents were at first but as little clouds rising out of the distant horizon, and disappeared for a time; but again they gathered thicker, and sometimes broke in small peals of thunder.

There were two other causes, also, that helped to disturb the serenity of the female inhabitants: one was our poor dear Seeth's visit to the church on that memorable occasion; and the other, the piano in the 'ladies' room,' on which everyone seemed to wish to play at the same times of the day. On both these questions, party spirit and battles of 'the sets' ran uncomfortably high; and though most frequently neutral, yet the gentlemen were not without bias, and were obliged to fight their wives' battles, warmly enough, sometimes. I think if I had the power and ingenuity of Mr. Trollope, I might find materials enough for a very spicy detail of male and female doings and sayings during this period, and of the many pretensions to the fair hands of Miss Mostyn and Miss Lucy Home, and their results; and even of attentions to poor Miss Clay, a rather antiquated spinster who resided with her sister, Mrs. Mowbray, of the —th. These, I say, with occasional brushes with the Pandies outside the walls, by way of sensation, are very tempting materials, but as I am not Mr. Trollope, I regret I cannot avail myself of them on this occasion, and must pursue the tenor of the history I am recording.

'I really can't stand this any longer, Philip,

said Mrs. Mostyn, as she went into his den, as he called it, a small ante-chamber of the old palace, 'those women are too bad—so unlady-like!'

'Why, what's the matter now, Rose, anything new? I'm really tired of the scrags of mutton battles, and the drumsticks in the curry, and the brown of the rice pudding,' replied Mr. Mostyn. 'What's the matter?'

'No, Philip,' cried his wife, 'it's not scrags of mutton, or curry bones, or rice puddings—it's spite! What do you think I heard two *ladies* say just now, quite loud enough for me to hear, and evidently intended for my ears, I'm sure. Now you'll never guess, though you are a judge.'

'I can't imagine, Rose—about Seeta? for I see some of them hate her.'

'Not exactly, Philip; but, just think, they said that Grace was a governess, and that's why she taught a "black woman" like Seeta, and gave lessons to that stupid Lucy Home.'

'Well,' said Mr. Mostyn, laughing, 'I don't see any harm in that; and if Grace had been a governess, I'm sure I shouldn't be ashamed of her, nor would you.'

'Oh, it's not that, Philip; but see the spite of it. It's just like their sneering ways and speeches,

and I should like to box that Mrs. Smith's ears ten times a day,' she replied, with a stamp of her foot. 'What do you think my lady did? Just after she had shot her arrow at me, Grace came in with some music in her hand, and I know wanted to practise; but Mrs. Smith, if you please, just seats herself on the stool, and begins to strum some horrible quadrilles and waltzes—all wrong, too—and there she is still, and poor Grace fit to cry. Won't you come and speak to the wretch?'

'No,' said Philip. 'It is insolence, I know, but we need take no notice. I will tell Smith privately to caution his wife, and I know he hates her tongue as much as you do.'

'Very well,' said Rose with a little pout, 'do as you like; but if I were a man——never mind,' she continued, 'it's not worth notice; but can't we get rid of them all by going to our own house? Mrs. Smith can't go to hers, for it was burnt; but ours is all right. We went down yesterday morning with Mr. Brandon and Seeta, and the flowers are really lovely. And then you know all is quiet; there has not been an alarm even for more than a month.'

'Yes,' he said, 'I think it's a capital idea. We have enough police for a night guard,

and I need not ask the Brigadier; besides, I am really not well, and the change will do me good. Pooh!' he continued, as if assuring himself, 'and we shall be right under the guns of the fort. There was an attempt there once, which I think the Nawab's rascals have not forgotten, and will not repeat. I'll see the Brigadier about it presently. And now go away, wife; I am really very busy with my report, and all these dreadful statistics, and don't you mind Mrs. Smith.'

The Brigadier had no objection. He only suggested caution, and that it would perhaps be better to sleep in the fort the first few days at any rate, and this was done. Early every morning, the ladies walked down to their garden, and every evening they came up in their tonjon. Sometimes Seeta was with them, sometimes not. She liked to be alone more than usual. She had her own troubles of mind which she dare tell to no one—no, not even to Cyril or Grace, though both suspected them, but would not speak about them to her as Mrs. Pratt did.

Were the foundations of the old Hindooism—the grand citadels of the Vedas and the Bhugwut Geeta, the metaphysics of Patánjula giving way? Sometimes Cyril thought they were, and Mrs. Pratt, who knew a little about them—but

not much—thought so too; yet only sometimes, for Seeta's defence was strong and subtle. She had been an apt scholar of Wamun Bhut, one of the best disputants of the Vedantic Brahmins of the Noorpoor province against the materialist Poorânic sectarians; and she had all his arguments by heart, and often became fierce over them; while, finding she had grown rusty in some respects, she had lately almost neglected her English, to regain what she had lost. If Mrs. Pratt or Cyril had been as deeply versed in Hindoo theology as Seeta was, they might have had many a fervid battle; but, to all her learning, they could only oppose the simple truths, and faithful realities of their own belief. Nothing of dogma was ever mentioned; only a Saviour's atonement for sin, his present help in all trouble, and faith to realise his gracious promises. It was truly a type of stormy waves beating against a rock, for Seeta grew fond of these arguments; fonder and fonder, as it appeared to Grace and Cyril, who did not encourage, and indeed avoided them. But Mrs. Pratt did encourage them, and rejoiced to hear them. The dear old lady argued from Seeta's persistence, that the good seed had taken root; but whether it had fallen among thorns, or in

a dry and barren place, or in rich and fruitful soil, who could as yet tell? Who, indeed? Certainly not the Hindoo girl herself, who, with prayers and cries, when she was alone in her oratory or sitting in the oriel window looking over the lake, besought to be led aright.

Simple-minded and unworldly herself, Mrs. Pratt found Seeta equally simple in regard to all temporal matters. Mrs. Pratt knew she was wealthy; but Seeta seemed to have no idea of the value of her wealth or its use to others. She had committed all to her grandfather and her husband; 'and, should I have a child,' she said modestly, 'it would inherit all.'

'No,' said Mrs. Pratt, 'I am sure it could not. Only a Hindoo could inherit from a Hindoo—at least I think not—and you can't make a will as we can. Why not ask Mr. Mostyn about the whole matter, and take his advice? It appears to me, that at least there would be great litigation for your property, my dear, if you have any relations.'

But, except Ram Das, Seeta knew of none.

'But my child would inherit the English property; no one could keep him out of that,' said Seeta, as if driven into a corner; 'that has nothing to do with Hindoos.'

'My darling,' said Mrs. Pratt, as the colour rushed into her face, 'it needs some one you believe in to tell you the truth about that. Has your husband never said anything to you on the subject?'

'O, yes, mother' (Seeta always called Mrs. Pratt mother), 'he has many times; but'—and her face flushed in turn—'he never mentioned about England. O, I should like to see my son an English gentleman, like his father! Why should he not be?' she added proudly, as she saw an incredulous look on the old lady's face. 'He would be a Christian—the Honourable Cyril Brandon.'

'Now you will be angry with me, my child, if I tell you the truth,' returned the old lady; 'but, sooner or later, some one must do so, and Grace cannot. Will you hear it from me?'

'What is it?' asked Seeta, much agitated. 'Let me put my head on your breast, and I shall not be afraid.'

'Faithfully then, and as if I were truly your mother, I will tell you,' continued Mrs. Pratt. 'By English law and Christian custom, if you had a son as you are, he could not inherit except what was specially given him. He would have

no rank and no name; he would, indeed, be illegitimate.'

'But I am married,' she cried, starting up, with her eyes blazing. "Cyril told me I was, and Narendra, and Wamun Bhut. I have not been living in sin, mother? Oh, do not say that—I should die!'

'No, darling; by the rites of your faith you are Mr. Brandon's wife, and as such we have taken you to our hearts and love you. But the English law does not recognise that. Your rites are not ours, Seeta.'

'Then if I were married to him by Mr. Pratt,' she gasped through her sobs, which were coming heavily and fast, 'should I be truly his wife, by your law and ours?'

'Yes, Seeta, you would; but Mr. Pratt could not marry you to Mr. Brandon while you are a Hindoo.'

'God help me! God help me!' was the girl's bitter cry as she threw herself once more on the dear old lady's breast. 'God help me, for I know not what to do!'

'And He will help you, my sweet child, if you cry to Him,' returned Mrs. Pratt, sobbing in her turn; 'no one ever turned to Him in doubt or difficulty like yours, and sought Him in a child's

spirit with an earnest heart, that he did not direct. No matter what you say to Him, he will hear. Do you believe that? But,' continued the old lady, as Secta clung convulsively to her, 'let no worldly care or thought influence you, or come between you and God; put them all away when you go to Him. I know all your trials, my darling, and I would help you more if I could; but the message to you, must come from Him, not from one like me. Now dry your tears and be hopeful, and brave as you always are, and I am sure you will do right.'

I dare not say what effect this conversation had upon Secta, nor tell of the mighty struggles that were going on in her gentle loving heart; and I think it would be profanation to attempt to describe them. To outward appearance, indeed, she seemed even gayer than was usual with her! and it was only Grace and Cyril who felt, in some degree, that a crisis in her fate was at hand. Nor did Secta omit to consult Mr. Mostyn. As a child might go to a father, so she did to him one day when he was alone; and told all her anxiety, not of her faith, but of her condition in life. Need I say that Mrs. Pratt's opinion was confirmed? Mr. Mostyn did not even tell Rose of this consultation: he only said, 'I wish Secta were

baptised and married;' and Rose Mostyn echoed the wish. 'Oh! that she were,' she said, 'our pet would be so happy, and Cyril even more than she.'

How pleasant it was now for all! The old occupations were resumed with enjoyment after their long suspension. The splendid 'Erard,' which had been covered up with a heap of blankets, was in excellent tune, and the friends enjoyed their reading, and their music and drawing, with their old spirit and skill. All alarms from without had passed away: and the advices to the merchants of Noorpoor, which arrived from Dehly, told of the immense English force that besieged the city which the Sepoys could now barely hold, and which would soon be stormed. We who heard this news, remember the intense excitement of that time; the turning point of that awful struggle; and hoped and feared by turns as to its decisive effect upon the Sepoy war, into which the widely scattered events had changed.

From without, however, no intelligence came to Noorpoor, except from Shah Gunje, to which Buldeo had again penetrated, and brought back letters from the old banker and Aunt Ella.

'We are weary of oppression,' wrote Narendra to Mr. Brandon; 'all classes are sighing and

praying for the English to return. Our Temple has been defiled by the Moulvee, and the people here, and all through the country, are yearning for you. When can you come to help us? A thousand men would follow you, and I have money enough for all. As to myself I am a prisoner, and Ram Das has appropriated all my books, and carries on the business in his own name. The Moulvee and the Nawab have decided the suit in his favour; but I am not disturbed by that. Once you come again, all he has taken will return to me: and if it is lost, what matter? Only come soon, come soon!'

'And we will go, little one,' said Cyril cheerily; 'I have a plan in my head already, and, my darling, we will drive out the rebels, and Aunt Ella shall have her Temple again, and cry "Ram!" as much as she pleases.'

'Dehly is taken!' cried Baba Sahib in an ecstacy of delight, as a few mornings after, at daylight, he called Mr. Brandon out, 'Dehly is taken! O! thank God, sir, thank God! An express came to Poorun Mul Mahajun in the night, and here is the printed paper, which came with it; which Poorun Mul sends with his compliments and congratulations. Thank God, sir, that the tempest of 1914 is spent at last.'

Cyril could hardly read the little slip of 'Extra.' But there was no mistake. After six days of hard fighting the city had been won on the 19th of September. The 'Asylum of the World' was a helpless fugitive! As soon as he had told Seeta, Cyril ran to the Judge's house, showed the paper to him, and then went up by the water gate—where the guard cheered him as he read it to them—to the fort to tell the joyful news to the Brigadier; nor was it long before the guns thundered out a Royal Salute, the most glorious that those who listened to it had ever heard. A joyful thankful day, indeed, was it among the weary residents of Noorpoor; and even petty bickerings and jealousies seemed to be forgotten.

'Let us have a small dinner, Rose,' said Philip Mostyn to his wife. 'Let me see: the Brigadier, and the two commanders, Hobson, and Wharton of the artillery, and Noble; just ten. We can manage that, and I will write to them all.'

It was the day after they had heard the glorious news from Dehly, and all were in the highest spirits. Seeta no less than the others, for Cyril had told her that he should soon now put his plan in execution, and she should see Narendra and dear Aunt Ella once more.

So there was a pleasant party at the Judge's;

and much talk and speculation ensued at dinner upon what might be going on elsewhere. After the ladies had retired for a short time, the gentlemen joined them in the drawing-room, and the piano was opened and the music began as usual. Never were the parties in better voice, for their good spirits gave them unusual energy; and it was a treat to sing there after so long. Secta had listened for some time, sitting in Grace's boudoir which adjoined the drawing-room; and she had gone home to dress for the night ride with Cyril, for the patrols were still continued. She changed her clothes and went up on the terrace of part of her cottage, and was sitting by herself thinking much, when Buldeo suddenly called to her from below, 'Come down! come down! I have seen them! Quick, lady!' And almost as he spoke, looking towards the shrubbery near the road, she saw distinctly a body of men moving silently and rapidly. In an instant she was flying down the steps with her utmost speed and up the gravel walk to the Judge's house. Entering by the back, she ran on through the house, and burst into the drawing-room, where Grace and Cyril were singing the old 'Dimmi che m'ami ancor.' All looked strangely at her for a moment; but terror was in her face, she was out of breath

and could only cry out, 'Fly! get to the fort, the rebels are on us,' when shouts arose outside, and a volley was fired through the windows, shattering the glass and frames, and knocking plaster from the walls.

No one, then, went about without arms; and there were loaded guns, revolvers, and swords in the corners of the room; each snatched his own weapons, and as yet no one was harmed. If it had been possible, the officers would have held the drawing-room till succour should reach them from the water gate; but it was not to be done, the attacking party had at once fired the thatch in several places, and the blaze spread over the garden, increasing every instant. 'Look to the ladies, gentlemen,' cried the Brigadier sharply; 'we must cover them.' There was now a great clamour without, for the Judge's police guard and Cyril's, with the Rahtores had struck in manfully; but they were too few to stop the attack at once.

Cyril was supporting Grace, who had clung to him; and Seeta, whose presence of mind seemed to be rising, also put her arm round her, and led her on. Mr. Mostyn and one of the other officers hurried on Mrs. Mostyn. They had already got down the steps, and Cyril was follow-

ing, when Azrâel Pandé, more terrible to look on than ever, his eyes staring, and his livid shattered face convulsed with passion, sprang suddenly on him from a corner of the verandah, with his spear. Cyril parried the thrust, and made a cut with his sword in return, which was caught on his spear by the Dacoit, when at that instant a chance shot struck Cyril in the right arm, and his sword dropped. He was entirely at his enemy's mercy. 'Jey Kalee Mata!' shouted Azrâel. 'Dog of a Feringee! No escape now for thee,' and as he drew back his deadly weapon to strike, Cyril heard a cry—it was not a scream—and Seeta had rushed before him, receiving the blow in her breast. Then Captain Hobson, who had tried to save Seeta, or, as he first thought, Cyril, plunged his sword into the ruffian's heart, who, writhing impaled upon the weapon for an instant, fell to the ground and was dispatched, if indeed he lived, by Buldeo, with repeated thrusts of his own spear.

It was all the work of a moment, and while other combats were going on in the verandah and in the garden, and Luchmun Singh and the Rahtores, with the police were striking in with their war cries, Cyril stood for a moment stunned and bewildered. His right arm was pierced and nearly

useless: but he tried to raise up Seeta, while Grace Mostyn, who had not lost her presence of mind, was endeavouring to staunch the blood with her dress and her handkerchief. Then Hobson and Buldeo gently took up the wounded girl between them, and carried her down the steps, Cyril following, and Grace holding her hand. For a moment Seeta's eyes opened, and she said to Grace, faintly, 'Run, save yourself—let me die here,' and again relapsed into insensibility. So they carried her down the garden, till they were in some degree safe; then Buldeo undid his waist-cloth, and they put Seeta into it, and with some others carried her on gently to the water gate, where Mr. Mostyn, his wife, and others were preceding them.

As the officer at the gate saw the outbreak of the disturbance at Mr. Mostyn's, he had dashed down with half his men to the rescue; but he was too late. Dismayed by the death of their leader, and by the loss they had already sustained from the spirited defence of the officers and the guards, as well as from several discharges of grape which the watchful sergeant had fired at the crowd on Mr. Brandon's lawn, now perfectly distinct under the glare from his burning house, and Seeta's cottage, the rebel Sepoys and their

companions fled in confusion; and with the English guard covering the retreat of the party, in a few minutes the gate was entered and closed. Except a few hurried mournful words, no one spoke, as the sad procession wound up the path to the tower, lighted by the blazing houses, little heeding the rattle of musketry, and the guns from the cavalier, which showed that the attack on the Judge's house had been a feint for a more serious and obstinate one in front, than had ever occurred before.

END OF PART THIRD.

PART THE FOURTH.

CHAPTER XI.

'A CROWN OF LIFE.'

SEETA was not dead: though as they looked at her, again and again, as they moved slowly on, they thought her spirit had passed away. Grace, whose marvellous composure astonished them, and Mrs. Pratt, who hurried to the tower, with poor old Bheemee distracted by grief, undressed her and washed away the blood, and wrapping her, as well as they could, in one of her own garments, admitted Cyril and Dr. Home, who, with another surgeon, were in attendance. As yet Seeta had been quite insensible; but the dressing of her wound roused her a little, and she opened her eyes, and looked around her; but she did not recognise those about her, and only murmured plaintively for water, of which, when Bheemee gave to her, she drank freely; but again relapsed into unconsciousness.

'Is there any hope, doctor?' asked Cyril; it was all he could say then.

'I fear not,' replied Dr. Home. 'I fear not! Poor thing, poor thing. But we cannot judge yet. I have seen worse wounds, from which men have recovered; but she is so slight and delicate, and the injury is so near her heart. We can only do our best, Mr. Brandon. Would she take any stimulant? It might revive her, and we could judge her case better; as she is, I fear that she may sink at once.'

'I will try,' he replied; and he held what Dr. Home gave him in a glass to her lips. 'It is medicine, Seeta,' he said, 'to do you good; try and drink it, my darling; try!'

She understood what he said, and endeavoured to raise herself, stretching out her hand for the draught; but Cyril's arm trembled from the effect of the wound, and he made a sign to Grace, who took the glass from him; and as Seeta's fingers closed about it, directed it to her lips, and they saw that she drank nearly all.

'That will do! that will do! brave little soul that it is,' cried the Doctor, wiping his eyes; 'but, bless my heart, you are wounded too, Mr. Brandon! and while she lies quiet let me dress your arm: it must be very painful. I see, I see,' he continued, as he examined the wound; 'the ball has gone through, and you are saved the

pain of its extraction; and the bones, too, are yet sound and safe; but there is a good deal of laceration, and you may be thankful that the limb will be as good as ever by-and-bye.'

Grace and Mrs. Pratt still watched, and after a little, Mrs. Mostyn came in; but she seemed almost hysterical; and Mrs. Pratt told her that she had better go and lie down: and Mr. Mostyn, who was at the door, took his wife away. Her condition, indeed, forbade the risk of any undue excitement: and the scene at the house, though she did not then know of Seeta's wound, had well nigh overpowered her. Cyril even implored Grace to go with her; but she refused gently; and Mrs. Pratt, who fully estimated her calm strength of mind, and usefulness, asked Cyril not to press her, and he did not. Who, indeed, had loved Seeta better, or in whom did the poor sufferer trust more, than in these two loved friends?

What a night it was! No more attempts were made upon the water gate, for the assailants had already sustained heavy loss from the gun in the tower, and from another gun on a bastion not far off; but in front there was cover, and the rebels, who were evidently bravely and skilfully led, made the most of it in charging the loyal—th repeatedly, and inflicting considerable loss on them;

nor was it till the regiment began to be sorely pressed, and even appeared to be losing heart, that a company of English soldiers, with another in reserve at the main gate, were sent to their aid. Indeed it had been difficult to restrain the men, who were clamouring to be led against 'the Pandies,' and to help the brave —th. The succour was welcomed with a shout and a cheer which dismayed the rebels; yet they made a last charge, and were met by the Englishmen in the same spirit as Delhy had been won, and Lucknow relieved by Havelock and Outram; and when the reserve also struck in, the rebels fled, suffering heavily from showers of grape from the guns that commanded the parade. Then it was clear the attack was abandoned.

Although all those with Seeta, listened with throbbing anxious hearts to the tumult of the action, yet she did not appear to be conscious of its progress, nor of the sound of the heavy guns which were now and again fired. She seemed to be sleeping quietly, though she breathed heavily; and Dr. Home, who came in every now and then to feel her pulse, said it was stronger than he had even hoped for. So they waited and hoped. For some time the blaze of the houses had lighted up the room with a bright red glare; but that gradu-

ally faded, and at length died out in fitful flashes, and they had lighted candles which, shaded from her eyes, only threw a dim light over her. None of them spoke except in whispers; but the draught had to be repeated, and Grace, who had asked Seeta several times whether she could take it again, motioned to Cyril to speak to her.

'Seeta, my darling—little one,' he said gently, and using all his old terms of endearment, 'drink again what Grace gives you.'

The girl was roused at last as she heard the voice she loved best on earth, and tried to turn to it, but she put away Grace's hand, and looked at her husband. The sweet eyes were full of intelligence and love, so earnest, so wistful, so entreating, and Cyril thought her sensible now, and taking the glass from Grace's hand, put it to her mouth. She drank again, and sighed: but she would not release her husband's hand, and he sat down by her side, while the same earnest look continued and a faint smile played about her lips. It was as if, till then she had not known that he lived.

'Saved! saved!' she muttered at length. They were the first intelligible words she had spoken. 'O, I thank God! I thank God!'

'Yes, darling,' he said, 'we are all safe,

and here are your friends; can you speak to them?'

She looked round, and put out her hand to Grace, who, with Mrs. Pratt, were sitting on the floor beside the low bed, but she could not speak yet; she could only look at them, silently by turns, as a dog would at one it loved, and the great brown eyes seemed, for the time, full of warm soft light.

'Saved! saved!' she said again more distinctly. 'It is as I wished—only to die—for Cyril!—my lord!—my darling, look at me!'

'I am here,' he said, 'Seeta, close to you.'

'I thought—I thought,' she continued shuddering, 'that he who had the spear—ah! save him! Look! he strikes!'

'There is no one, Seeta; do not fear, my pet—only your Grace, and mother, and I.' But she did not seem to know them yet, and lay quiet, keeping her husband's hand in both of her own, close to her heart. The rest seemed to refresh her, and presently she asked for water very distinctly: and Bheemee, who had been sitting moaning without, rocking to and fro, brought her silver cup full of cool lemonade, which Dr. Home had ordered; but she put away the old woman's hand; and would only take it from her husband. Then

she drank long and easily, and looking round, said to them, 'I see you all, my darlings, now, but I have a great pain here. What has happened? Ah! I remember—but you are safe—all of you, Cyril?'

'All of us, Seeta,' answered Grace, kissing her; 'after that man was killed, we were safe. Ah! I thank God you know us again, my darling. Now you will soon be well, and we will all nurse you day and night, and God will heal all your pain.'

'Yes,' returned the girl, with the colour flushing to her white cheek, 'he will heal my pain, and I trust Him now——I always thought I could go to death—like Savitri—and it is very near now, I think——I seem to understand——what puzzled me so—better, I think. O, Cyril, what is this?' and she looked at the bandage on his arm. 'You are hurt!'

'Not much,' he said. 'You saved me, darling, and Hobson killed him when I was helpless.'

'Dead!' she said faintly. 'Dead? may God forgive him!'

'Do you forgive him, Seeta?' said Mrs. Pratt, 'and from your heart? He said, "forgive your enemies."'

'I do,' she returned firmly. 'Why was he my enemy? What had I done to him? O, pray for

me, mother; pray that the kind, good God may take a little child.'

Then the dear lady knelt down, and prayed. Many a dying bed had she prayed by in her long life; many a wavering, fainting Christian soul had she soothed to its last rest. But this was very different; the firm strong faith, the pleading as a little child, the perfect trust in One, whom she knew only very dimly—seemed to be growing triumphant now, over all doubt and fear and pain—and the dear lady prayed. Often broken were her words by sobs and tears, often faltering; but the few simple expressions she used, were, she knew, understood by the sufferer who had asked for them, and she saw, too, that Seeta's lips moved, while her hands were clasped together over Cyril's. She was praying——

Then there was silence; and they looked with wonder on the beautiful face, now smiling and full of joy, the lips parted, and the soft dewy eyes looking up in reverence and hope.

'My lord!—my Cyril!' she said at length, in her own language, but very faintly, as she turned her eyes full upon him. 'I would live for you if—if—it might be; but the Lord is calling me, and I cannot stay——Do not sorrow for me Cyril, when I am gone——only forgive your wife that

she was careless, negligent often, and so ignorant. But O, my lord, I loved you, my darling, and I would have done better if—if—I could, but I knew nothing. And you will tell them of all that has happened— — They will not forget me, Cyril, never; their little Seeta will be in their minds till they die, and Aunt Ella must not grieve—she must only remember the girl who loved her and played with her. You must go to them, Cyril, and tell them this—promise me you will, and tell Wamun Bhut that I loved him too.'

'I will,' he said, in a choking voice, 'if— — O Seeta, the Lord God will surely spare you to me, and we will go together to them. Keep a strong heart, my pet.'

'No,' she said, more faintly, 'it cannot be. He is calling me now. "Come to me," he says, "all ye that are heavy laden——"' And for a while she seemed wandering, and strange snatches of her Sanscrit prayers were mingled with lines of simple Christian hymns she had learned. Thus they sat and listened wonderingly, and saw that a change was passing over her face. Then Dr. Home came in and felt her pulse, and shook his head.

'It is fluttering now,' he said to Cyril. 'I can do no more, poor thing—poor child—she will soon be at rest.'

The morning was now breaking, the roar of the night tumult had ceased, and all was still. High up into the grey night clouds, a stream of crimson light had leaped suddenly, and was fast changing into gold below, and the still, placid lake, reflected the gorgeous spectacle in all its brilliancy.

Seeta was breathing heavily, but seemed to have no pain, and she only sighed now and then. Suddenly, and as though the vivid light had roused her, she raised herself a little, and stretched out her hands, and said the Vedantic invocation to the sun, which is called Gáyatri. It seemed as if she would have repeated the hymn also, but she had no strength, and as she fell back she cried faintly, 'Cyril! Grace! kiss me. Mother! He calls me again!—Listen! And there are the bright flowers of heaven!—Lord!—I come!' As they put their arms under her to support her she smiled, and sighed once, and as the glory of the sun rested on her face, her humble, loving spirit had passed away for ever.

'The life will not depart,' said Bheemee, 'unless ye lay her upon the earth!'

'It is gone,' replied Mrs. Pratt. 'She is at rest with God. Look how beautiful she is! Let us pray!' and she prayed that those who had seen Seeta die might, when their time to die came,

pass away in the same humble, faithful, child-like spirit.

Afterwards Cyril went out and sat down on the terrace where the gun was. He had cut one long tress of Seeta's hair, and laid it at his heart. The guard were there, and the honest fellows were crying, many of them, for they had heard what had happened, and they did not speak. Cyril was stunned and bewildered with the grief that had struck him so terribly and so suddenly. All he could realise was, that Seeta had gone; gone, to her eternal rest in God, surely believing, and trusting to the last; and her noble act of devotion had saved him. At such times, those who have their part in the household tragedies which happen every day around us, cannot realise much beyond the fact of the bereavement; and that, stunned as the mind feels, is borne passively, perhaps even calmly. The aching void is hardly felt then. Below, lay the ruins of the once pleasant houses, with the embers of the fire still smouldering; and on his own lawn, and in the garden, as well as about the Judge's house, many dead bodies were lying. It was a strange thought and impulse, but one Cyril acted upon immediately. 'Come with me,' he cried to some of the Rahtores and Buldeo who, with several of the police, were below the

bastion, and he went down to them, and they followed him to the water gate.

'You are not going out, Mr. Brandon?' said the officer on duty. 'Some of those scoundrels may be lurking about. At least, take a few of the men with you.'

'No,' said Cyril, 'I am much obliged, but you would be blamed, and I have my own stout fellows with me. I have been watching for some time from the tower, and have seen no one.'

Then he went on, direct to the Judge's house. Some jackals slunk away through the bushes in the garden, and half-gorged vultures flew up heavily into the trees. As he ascended the steps of the verandah the body of Azrael Pandé lay before him in a pool of blood: the staring, glassy eyes glistening in the light, and the foul, livid, shattered features, with the same look of hate and defiance on them, which he remembered as the fatal spear had been raised against him.

'Search him,' said Cyril to the police. 'See if there are any papers on him,' but they seemed to hesitate from dread.

'I did not fear him living, and I do not fear him dead,' said Buldeo as he stepped forward and began to unfasten the waist-cloth about the body of the Dacoit; and, assisted by the Sikhs and

others, it was soon stripped. Around the waist was a long leather bag, almost filled with gold coins; another similar bag held rubies, and a smaller one a number of fine pearls and unset precious stones.

'Ah! he cheated us out of these, sir,' said Buldeo, as he turned out the contents. 'They belonged to the Dacoity at ——, and here are the diamonds and the rubies which he told us were for the shrine of the Mata in Calcutta. Yes, he was a thief, too.'

There were no separate papers; but tied to his back there was a cloth case, which Buldeo handed to Mr. Brandon, in which was a Sanscrit book; and opening this, Cyril found some letters and other documents between the leaves, which he took out carefully and put into his own handkerchief. There was nothing else, and after leaf after leaf had been turned over, Cyril rose to go. As he flung the book down, one of the police would have taken it up, but Buldeo prevented him. 'That is the Gurura Pooran,' he said, 'from which the Maharaj there used to summon his devils. It should be burnt. Hrram, Hrram, Hrram! I hear it still! Fling it into the fire yonder, friend, or it will do us harm. And now, master, the last search follows. If Azraël had any secret in

the world, it is there;' and he took up the robber's quilted packet, and began to unrip it strip by strip. At last he came to two papers folded up, one in Persian, one in Hindee, which he handed to Cyril; but he did not abandon the garment till every stitch of it had been unripped, and every part explored. 'Now, sir, believe me; whatever he had most secret, is in your hands. Come away!'

Cyril took one look through the drawing-room, which was entire. There he had been singing with Grace when Seeta burst in through the folding doors; and on the piano, which had escaped—for the fire had not affected the strong terraced roof, and the folding doors were only partially burnt—was the old duet, 'Dimmi che m'ami,' smoke-stained, certainly, but entire. 'I will keep this,' he said to himself, 'in memory of the night.' And, with his men, he returned to the fort.

Baba Sahib was there already, and had brought his wife and other Brahmin women, and the professional dressers of the dead, who were busy with the last sad rites, and wailing and moaning, as was their custom. The room was no place to go into, and even to his faithful old friend, Cyril could say but little. Baba Sahib knew it must be so, and respected the grief he could not console.

And Philip Mostyn came, too, and wrung his friend's hand. What could he say? What could anyone say then? All there was to go through must be done. 'Rose and Grace will come to take leave of her,' he said; 'I will find out when they are ready inside.'

The women had dressed Seeta's head with garlands of flowers, and clothed her in one of her simple white muslin garments; and as she lay, looking like a wax figure, and with a beautiful but strange wondering look of the majesty of death on her sweet face, even the professional women sitting around her seemed to be awe-struck, and were silent; and when Mrs. Mostyn, Grace, Mrs. Pratt, Mrs. Hill, and Lucy Home came in, all stood up respectfully. I think they were as much awed as the others had been, and, for the most part, were silent too; but Grace and Mrs. Mostyn were sobbing bitterly, and would have knelt down and kissed the dear sweet face, only that Baba Sahib's wife prevented them.

'She has been purified for her death,' she said to Mrs. Pratt, who, she knew, understood her, 'and no one can touch her now!' But they each took a garland from her, and silently passed out, weeping.

Meanwhile, a pyre had been prepared below on-

the margin of the lake, close to the water gate, and Seeta was taken up and carried thither on a bier and laid upon it. The English soldiers had saluted the bier as it passed, and Cyril and Mostyn, Mr. Noble, and several others followed the mourning women who were chaunting the litany and hymns for the dead. Baba Sahib and many Brahmins, bare-headed, met them, and as the last sad wail arose, the pyre had been lighted.

'Enough!' said Philip Mostyn; 'you have done all you could, Cyril, come away!' And, supporting his friend, he led him from the mournful spectacle.

'I must see,' said Cyril, as they went up to the tower, 'what the papers I have found contain. My strong impression is, that they will throw light on my poor Seeta's death. I cannot rest, Philip, till I have examined them. Come and help me.'

There were two, as we know. One was a bond or acknowledgment from Ram Das, Banker and Goldsmith, for the sum of seven hundred and fifty rupees, dated the — August, 1855, and it had been increased by another item of one thousand, of which some payments were recorded.

'Ah!' said Mr. Mostyn, 'this is important indeed! Let me see! that was the day after the

murder of Hurree Das, I think, but I can refer to my notes of the trial. I have no doubt, now, that Ram Das was the instigator of that horrible affair.'

'Yes!' said Cyril, who was thinking, and much agitated, 'but this has the Nawab's seal to it,' and held it up, though his hand was shaking.

'Give it to me,' said his friend, 'you are not fit to read it.' And he read what I thus translate. Notwithstanding bad grammar and worse spelling the purport was quite intelligible:—

'In the name of God, the most clement and merciful.

'I, who am the Nawab Dil Khan Bahadoor (he had omitted his new dignities), covenant and promise to Colonel Azrâol Pandé Bahadoor, to give to him the sum of five thousand rupees, and the villages of Zynabad and Seetapoor, of the Talook of Noorpoor, of the annual value of rupees four thousand seven hundred, and all the lands and rights pertaining thereto.

'*Item.*—And for this grant, the aforesaid Colonel binds himself to attack the Judge's and Brandon's houses at Noorpoor, and to bring to me unharmed, Missy Mostyn, the sister of the Judge aforesaid, and to kill the Judge, and Brandon, and all other Feringees, men and women and children, that may be in the houses aforesaid, and in the

fort of Noorpoor, when my brave army has stormed and taken it.

'*Item.*—And in regard to Seeta Bye, I, Dil Khan Bahadoor, make no claim. She is to be the "Colonel" Sahib's slave, and he is at liberty to do as he pleases with her.'

'Written with my own hand, in my camp at Ryna; sealed by me, with my own seal; and signed by me, 'DIL KHAN.'

Cyril ground his teeth. 'If I could—— God help me,' he cried; 'this is no time to talk of revenge. Yes, Philip, there are two palankeens down there in my garden, abandoned. Think of what they escaped! Yes! she is at rest, now, my sweet darling!' he continued, sobbing, 'and these hellish conspiracies are at an end, for her.'

Philip Mostyn was much moved. He knew that Cyril had saved his sister, for he had seen some of the fight, and how he and Seeta had protected her. 'Horrible! horrible!' he said. 'But, I cannot bear to think of what Grace escaped, I only know what she owes to you, and to her who is gone.'

'Nay!' said Cyril, calmly; "not to me, but to Hobson—who saved us all. For this,' and he pointed to his wound, 'had made me helpless; and there was no one else near. But for him, I had died with her.'

CHAPTER XII.

'SHAH GUNJE.'

Some weeks had passed, wearily and sadly. At the moment, and, indeed, for many days after Seeta's death, Cyril Brandon had been stunned by the loss of one who had grown to be more his companion and friend than he had ever believed possible; and now, ensued the aching void, which there was nothing to fill up. He missed Seeta at every turn, and in every occupation she had shared with him. At first, their lives had not had much in common, perhaps; but the ardent nature of Seeta's mind had already overcome many hindrances to more perfect communion. In her indefatigable studies she had been chiefly guided by Grace Mostyn, whose serene and delicate feeling had been reflected in her pupil. It was almost unaccountable to Cyril and her friends, how much, and how rapidly, Seeta had learned during the last four months; how much her capacity had been enlarged, and her sense of comprehension vivified by her enthusiasm in her new pursuits. She

had, indeed, but one incentive to exertion: the desire to be, what she felt she ought to be, as Cyril's wife. Not the mere Hindoo girl, whom no one could know but her husband; but one who, in time, might take her place openly in the world, and of whom he should never be ashamed. And it had seemed to Grace and her sister that this might come to be; but that it would necessarily be impossible so long as Seeta retained her Hindoo faith and her customs.

Would she ever relinquish them? That, indeed, had been a subject of anxious discussion between all who loved Seeta; but even Mrs. Pratt, whose education and experience as a missionary, gave her more weight and perception than Mrs. Mostyn or Grace, had hesitated to make any decided attempt at conversion. Seeta's mind was not yet prepared for the change. She could not throw off caste. She could not dissever herself from her old associations and her deep love for those who remained at Shah Gunje. She could not at once abandon the old belief in which she had been reared, and the deep and often grand metaphysical arguments by which it was supported. Before these, the simplicity of Christian truth, had, at first, indeed, appeared childish, if not contemptible; and yet how they had per-

ceptibly grown upon her! How they were urging her on to take one final, irrevocable step, we already know in part, but not entirely. Nor is it needful for me to lay bare the struggles of that loving, pious heart more than I have already done in these imperfect pages. Such struggles, even in Christian hearts yearning to feel the truth, are often long and terrible; how much more, then, those of a heathen, with intellect and education powerful enough to understand it, and yet with every consideration, before held most sacred and precious, not only to be risked, but abandoned entirely for a new faith, and altogether new affections and associations. If she renounced Hindooism, she should be a stranger in her grandfather's home. She could not eat with them, or live with them, at all, as she had used to do. They might reproach her, and refuse to see her; and Wamun Bhut, her revered preceptor, would be grieved to the heart. Her old associates would despise her, for she knew how Christianity was esteemed among them—nay, how she had esteemed it herself, hardly a year ago. If Cyril died, and he might die before her, and she were a Christian, who could receive her, when her caste was gone? No penance, no fine, no entreating of the Guild, or the Brahmins at Benares, could

restore what she had designedly given up. She must live alone, as an outcast; and if she died, who would even bury her?

I say these and a thousand other thoughts were daily passing through Seeta's mind, as the time went on, and the weakening of the old bulwarks of her faith was progressing; and, perhaps, in this respect, Seeta is only a type of thousands and thousands of her own countrymen and women, who feel the truth, and who, until some unforeseen crisis in their lives arises, dare not make the final plunge which not only severs them from all they love, honour, and respect in life, but makes them social outcasts—utterly despised and rejected by their people, even to the refusal of a cup of cold water. Too many among us, blame the hardness of the heathen, and call their belief in their own faith by very ugly names; but I think the utmost bound of charity needs to be extended to them when we think on—if we can at all estimate—the force of the reality of struggles like Seeta's. And yet they who watched by the dying girl in that memorable night, knew how near she was in faith to God, in whom she trusted as a child. Would she ever have accepted baptism? They could not tell, for none had dared to ask. They had been content to watch the mental

struggle and to comfort and encourage Seeta as well as they could.

Yet towards becoming a Christian, the advantages in a worldly point of view, appeared by far more decided than in continuing as she was. Mrs. Pratt had put Seeta's position before her more plainly than any one, except Cyril himself, who had never concealed it. As a Christian, he would marry her by Christian rites. No one could then deny her right to social rank and position. She might go to England, and visit Lady Hylton. She might even, if Cyril's brother died, be a Lady Hylton too, honoured and respected. If she bore children to her husband, they would no longer have a stigma of illegitimacy according to English law; and had she not of her love, of her faith and constancy, cast her lot with a Christian? So it would seem to be her duty to belong, to her husband's faith; to abandon all else, loving and venerating it, never so much. Had she any right to refuse what she knew her husband would hail with delight? Then she and Grace would be indeed sisters, for Mrs. Mostyn had said playfully one day, that she and Mrs. Pratt must be her godmothers. All this Seeta knew, yet it had not dazzled her, not helped to still the tempest in her heart, in which no worldly motives were engaged.

Yet the crisis was nigh, and a few, a very few days perhaps, would most probably have decided the question, which was solved otherwise, now, and for ever.

Baba Sahib had taken upon himself the duty of writing to Narendra and his sister, and he enclosed a note to them, only a few words, from Cyril. What could he say who could find no comfort himself? But little indeed, except to bear bravely, what had befallen them all. I think one of their greatest comforts at Shah Gunje was to think that they were not forgotten by Cyril; but Aunt Ella was in sore trouble on many accounts. Seeta had not been purged from her offences against caste. If she had only gone to Benares at once, when Huree Das died! If, indeed! Then she would have returned like unto Aunt Ella herself, and this little history had never been written. It was some comfort to know that Baba Sahib and the guild at Noorpoor, had managed the cremation, and performed all needful ceremonies; and Wamun Bhut would see to the rest. Altogether, perhaps, at first, Aunt Ella was more resigned to the sad occurrence than it appeared likely she should be. The one great dread that Seeta should become a Christian was at rest; there was nothing to prevent her soul resting in peace, and perhaps the long continuance

of rigid asceticism, and the painful attempts to discern the end of her nose, had blunted the old lady's feelings of humanity and love not a little; at all events as regarded outward observances or demonstrations. But few perhaps knew, how often, as she rose in the night to bathe in cold water, to sit in wet clothes, and to repeat her 'Ram, Ram, Ram,' natural feelings would have their bent: and as the sweet child who had grown up before her, the tendrils of whose love had clasped themselves round her heart, came to her in spirit and seemed to caress her—Aunt Ella felt them clinging there still, and wept passionate floods of tears—unknown to all besides. I think, too, that Narendra, wise as he was in worldly matters, thought, after a while, more gently of the bereavement than at first. Seeta, once part of his daily life, had been gradually separated from it. Latterly that separation had become wider, and it would never have surprised the old man to hear that Seeta had become a Christian; indeed he was so satisfied of Mr. Brandon's honour, that news of such a change in his wife's faith would almost have been welcomed, as assuring him of more perfect accordance in their lives. It is probable that poor Seeta might, in this respect, have overrated the effect of home influences; and her own determina-

tion had been to see them once more ere she came to a final decision on the most momentous crisis of her life.

Buldeo, as before, had carried the letters to Shah Gunje. He found the old man submissive and patient, waiting, as he said, a turn in public affairs. Ram Das seldom left Shah Gunje; he had appropriated all the apartments on the lower storey of Narendra's house, sat in the old banker's seat, and transacted all the business; but he had not discovered the banker's hidden hoard, and the correspondents and agents had declined to remit the balances they held without direct orders from Narendra, which he refused to give; so except the gathering up of moneys that had been lent in the district around, Ram Das had indeed derived little benefit. Thus he was daily tantalised by the consciousness that large, very large sums of money which belonged to Narendra, were beyond his reach—at least for the present; and the hope that there should be 'no English' was perhaps passing into a dread that that hope might not, after all, be fulfilled.

Around, and within Shah Gunje, the people were beginning to rouse themselves against the Moulvee's oppressions, which indeed were grievous in many ways, and hard to bear. Not only were the

tribe of swash-buckler soldiery, who attended him, violent and unruly, but the farmers and land-holders began to find that demands upon them for instalments of revenue in advance, were increasing in amount, and were levied with even greater cruelty than before; and they had sent word to Narendra that if Mr. Brandon would only come, they could muster enough men of their own to drive the Moulvee out of Shah Gunje, and hold the town and district for the English. In his letter therefore to Mr. Brandon, Narendra, after some kind words of comfort to him on Seeta's death, pressed him to come quickly. 'I have money enough to pay the men that will assemble,' he wrote, 'and they will be many; and when you deliver us from oppression, your name will live gratefully for ever in all our hearts.'

Indeed, it appeared a most opportune time in which good service might be done by an active movement with the assistance of the people themselves. They only wanted a leader, and Mr. Brandon felt assured that not only would Government approve of action against the rebels, but would sanction any expedition necessary for the purpose. Money he could not burden himself with; but Narendra would provide funds, and Buldeo had assured him that without his proceed-

ings becoming known, he and the Rahtores could lead him to Shah Gunje by secure but unknown paths through the forests. Nor was Mr. Brandon less anxious to secure Ram Das, whose original crime could, he considered, be brought home to him in the evidence which the search of Azráel Pandé's body had furnished, and there would be more procurable if he could only get to Shah Gunje. There were several accounts in Azráel's handwriting found among his other papers, all pointing to transactions with Ram Das, which had begun about the time of the murder of Huree Das, but which could only be perfectly understood by an examination of the goldsmith's books. Buldeb had often been examined as to the antecedents of the affair at Gokulpoor, but he was consistent in declaring that he knew nothing. He had been absent on an errand to a village, and had rejoined Azráel at Shah Gunje, and the gang at the waterfall, only on the day the Dacoity was committed. He had heard certainly that a banker had come to the waterfall, and brought money; and that two of the scouts, Sumbho and Govinda, had accompanied him; but whether he was Ram Das, or not, he could not tell. 'If I could only find out where these two men are,' he said, 'we should know all; but they disappeared when the Dacoity was

discovered, and Azráel was apprehended, and must have fled from the country.'

Buldeo's brother, Foorsut, had long since joined him; and was now one of Cyril's most active spies. He had not known of the intended attack on Noorpoor, or proposed abduction of Seeta and Miss Mostyn. The Nawab and his army were at Ryna, watching Hurpál Singh; and Azráel had remained in his retreat, growing more and more wild and uncontrollable. Even Goor Bux had given him up, and left him with three men to take care of him. One morning, however, after one of his most fearful nights, Azráel and the others had suddenly left Futtehpoor, desiring him to remain; and there he had waited many days, till at last the Sepoys returned, one of them being badly wounded. They told him the army had been repulsed at Noorpoor, and they had seen Azráel killed by Captain Hobson and Buldeo, just as he was on the point of seizing Seeta. There had been great hope that the surprise of Noorpoor would be complete, and there were palankeens provided by Azráel to carry away some of the ladies; but the attack had failed, and there was great discontent in the army in consequence. After their comrade died, Foorsut therefore was free to act for himself, and had brought away

Azráel's property, such as it was, and given himself up. Then he and Buldeo, who could never rest for more than a very few days at a time, went out occasionally to bring in news, the last of which was, that the armies of the Nawab and Hurpál Singh had fought together, and that Hurpál Singh had the worst of it, and had returned to his castle; but that the Nawab's Sepoys were mutinous, and wanted to take him to Jhansy or Cawnpoor, and that he was helpless in the hands of Colonel Goor Bux, who now did as he pleased.

'I am quite clear, Philip, it will be the best thing to do,' said Cyril to Mr. Mostyn one day, not long after Buldeo and his brother had returned from their last expedition as scouts; 'and if we carry Shah Gunje, of which I have little doubt, the whole country will be with us. Baba Sahib is entirely of my opinion, too. It is quite impossible to remain here with all that has happened so fresh in my memory, that every day seems a repetition of the same horrible scene. Indeed, I try not to complain, Philip; but you can hardly put yourself in my place, and feel what I do. If I succeed, I may win some credit, and if I don't come back to you, there will be only one more gone, who tried to do his duty.'

'And were I in your place, I would do the

same, Cyril,' replied his friend. 'I know you won't be rash, and you must always remember that you have others to think of at home, as well as yourself. But you won't go alone?'

'No, Philip; Temple will come with me, and I shall leave Noble in charge. Hobson would have come, also, but his wound is not healed, and while the nucleus of his regiment is here, the Brigadier says he must stay; and he is very sorry about this. Twenty-five volunteers from his men were called for, and we shall have as fine a set of fellows with us as men need to have.'

So it was settled that they should go; and it was with a lighter heart than he had had since Seeta died, that Cyril Brandon took leave of Mr. Mostyn and Grace, and other friends; and as the small party assembled at the gate at dusk one evening, the English soldiers and the officers all came out and gave him three hearty cheers, and wished him a safe return. Poor Mrs. Mostyn had been much affected, and could hardly speak to him; but Grace, though her tears were falling fast, told him to go and do his duty, and prayed that God would keep him safely.

'If I do return,' he replied earnestly, 'I shall be very thankful; and if I do not, I cannot leave you without again telling you how deeply grateful

I feel for all your love and affection for my dear wife, even to the last, a feeling which will only increase with time;' and so he left her.

What a pleasant march it was! The sense of freedom, the open country, the absence from that almost unbearable atmosphere of petty squabbles and jealousies, gave the companions new heart. Cyril's wound was almost healed, and he had regained the use of his hand and arm, which was at one time rather doubtful. The first night they rested at the Gáo Mookh, under the trees, where the tents had been pitched months before. The Incherna was now a considerable body of water, and plunged into the chasm with a dull, sullen roar, sending up clouds of spray. How true had been his poor Seeta's augury! A brief term of happiness, and as it seemed nearest the highest fulfilment, yet to be dashed away! Next morning they plunged into the forest below, by a rough path, and making as rapid marches as possible, reached the foot of the glen, at the head of which was the Temple, and the waterfall, with which this tale commenced.

The place on which they encamped was an open level spot, close by the stream, a short green sward, which looked indeed like a meadow. All around were lofty rugged hills, which seemed to

close up the amphitheatre, leaving only room for the stream to escape under a lofty precipice. And then the place was perfectly free from observation; nor was there any village much nearer than Shah Gunje, which was about seven miles distant.

'O that I were free!' cried Narendra, as Buldeo came to him that night with the message from Cyril; 'that I might go at once to meet him; but I must seem more than ever to be a prisoner. Tell him that all are ready, and he will meet a thousand men to-morrow night at the waterfall. He need not delay; let him bring them on at once, while their blood is hot. Let him send a party to release me, and I will soon be with him.'

On the afternoon following, Cyril and Temple, with the Rahtores and his orderlies, moved cautiously up the glen, by the margin of the stream, and after a rough scramble the little piece of sward under the waterfall was reached. They were the first there, and had time to admire the extreme beauty of the spot, now glowing under the orange rays of the setting sun, which shone directly upon it, lighting up the gaunt arms of the old Peepul tree, and the precipice and fall, with golden light. Round the tree, flocks of paroquets and wild pigeons were wheeling, as they

settled to their night's rest; and down the glen, pea-fowl were screaming as they flew from side to side of the stream.

'This is the place whence we went to the Dacoity at Gokulpoor,' said Buldeo. 'It is an old rendezvous of ours; and look, there are the crucibles in which Azrael melted the gold and silver. No one has been here since, for our marks have not been disturbed;' and he pointed to a few twigs arranged in a peculiar manner at the entrance to the Temple.

Presently the sun went down and the night fell, and the sound of a village horn was heard far away in the distance. 'That is the signal,' said Buldeo; 'that is Bulram Singh's horn, and he will be here with his two hundred clansmen.' Bulram Singh was the old friend of Cyril, that we know of, and with him were allied most of the petty chieftains of the Noorpoor district. Nor was Buldeo mistaken, for in a short time they heard a body of men descending the path which led to the Temple, and Bulram Singh hurried on to meet the two friends who stood at the entrance to receive him. Heartily embracing Bulram Singh, who was sobbing like a child, Cyril bid him be of good heart, and if all were like him, the district would soon be cleared.

'They are all coming, sir,' he replied; 'all that we need. There will be a thousand men or more here to-night. Then we will take you on silently.'

And it was a strange wild scene, when, as there was no room for the men, leader after leader came down the path, and, introduced by Bulram Singh, presented the hilt of his sword: and when all were there, some one lighted a torch, and the glare spread over the bronzed determined faces of some fifty men, petty landholders, heads of villages, all of whom Cyril had known before. Truly they seemed in earnest.

'My friends,' he said, 'I could not come sooner, for I was wounded, and my arm was helpless; but I am among ye at your own call, and we will free ourselves from the tyranny from which all are suffering. Keep together and do not speak, let no one fire a shot. Ye all know the place. One half go with me, another with my friend here, whom ye do not know, but whom I know to be brave and true; and now—for no one can hear it here—one cheer for the English, "Jey Koompani Bahadoor." ' And it was heartily answered by all, and taken up by the masses of men above, ringing through the air till Cyril feared it might be heard far away.

'The horses and horsemen are come,' said one of the Sikh orderlies as he came up; 'and we are all ready, sir!' and with another shout of 'Joy Brandon Bahadoor,' the leaders moved on, followed by Cyril, and Temple, who was wild with delight and excitement. 'Quite dramatic, isn't it, Brandon?' he cried; 'what a scene for a play!'

When they were close to Shah Gunje, there was another short halt; nothing seemed to be stirring within the town. The gates were shut, but there were gaps in the wall which were not guarded, and, entering by them, the surprise was complete. Cyril who knew the town needed no guide, had sent Bulram Singh with Temple, who took him direct to the local court house, whence some sounds of music were proceeding. The Moulvee, in fact, had been holding one of his nightly revels; and the party rose in confusion as the young Englishman and his companions entered. Then there was a short *mêlée*, and the Moulvee rushing at Temple with a shout of execration, was shot by him as he advanced, and all the rest were soon sabred or overpowered.

'You should have left him to me, sir,' said Bulram Singh; 'I had marked him for my own, but I was too late.'

'Yes, too late, my friend,' replied Temple; 'but

you were busy enough, I think,' as he observed his bloody sword. 'Well done, well done!'

Meanwhile Cyril had advanced on the dear old house he remembered so well. There was a strong guard at the gate, but ere he could pass the chowke, he heard a clamour within, and many of the guard ran out crying, 'Treachery! treachery!' The fact was that Buldeo, with several of the Rahtores, had been admitted from behind by the women-servants: had gained the inner court, and while Ram Das, who slept there, was being bound by two of the men, the remainder attacked the guard from within, and put them to flight, with terrible use of their heavy swords. The rest was completed by Cyril's men, and as he entered the old court he saw the tall figure of the banker standing on the steps with his arms outstretched, crying to him to come, for he had once more saved his life and his honour. 'And you are safe, you are safe,' he said again and again, passing his hands over him. 'O thanks be to God who sent you,' and Aunt Ella too was close behind, who threw her arms about Cyril's neck, and wept and laughed hysterically, and cried her thanks incoherently, till her brother drew her away, trembling as she was, and bid her be silent.

'And Ram Das?' asked Cyril; 'he has not escaped, I hope?'

'No, sir,' said one of the Rahtores who stepped from within. 'He tried to strangle himself with his hands, but we tied them up with his turban,' and he is quite safe. Come and see him.'

Yes, he was quite safe, writhing on the floor, with an expression of malignity on his evil face, which Cyril thought even Azráel's had not surpassed; but he did not speak.

Presently Temple came in, full of praises of Bulram Singh and all who had been with him. 'A few of the rebels have escaped,' he said, 'but we have a good many prisoners, for I could not kill the wretches who had put grass in their mouths and were crying for quarter; but a good many are dead. Every gate is guarded, and I am glad to say we have only a few wounded. Who would have thought these rustics would have fought as they did?'

'They only wanted you to lead them, sir,' said Narendra gracefully, 'and may God bless you both. Many there are who will come to kiss your feet to-morrow.'

Then they sat talking of the past almost till the day broke; sadly, indeed, but very lovingly. 'It is strange, Mr. Brandon,' said Narendra, as Cyril

lay down to take some sleep, 'that our darling had always an idea she should die for her husband; and in this her belief was fulfilled to the last. So let her live in our memories as one whose devotion saved you, and whom God spared the misery that ruffian had intended for her.'

Next morning the town was like a fair. The people from villages around brought in garlands of flowers, and laid them at Mr. Brandon and Temple's feet. The dancing girls of Shah Gunje dressed themselves in their gayest apparel, and spreading carpets in the chowke, danced and sang ballads in Cyril's praise which they had often sung before, but never with more spirit and applause. Then as the old English flag was once more hoisted amidst the shouts of the people, and garlands were hung on the staff, and cast at its foot, all felt that the English were in authority once more, and there would be peace. Before daybreak a party of cavalry and the Rahtores had been despatched with two of Narendra's clerks to Gokulpoor, where the books and papers of Ram Das had been seized and brought in; and before evening of a busy day, order had been quite restored. The treasury of the district was found to be full, for the Moulvee had intended to take away what he had collected himself; and as a

head local authority was needed, Bulram Singh was appointed by Mr. Brandon, and was accepted by the people with joy. As to the guild of goldsmiths, they went in an abjectly penitent body to Narendra's house and besought him to resume his authority; and in all respects there was rejoicing that day in Shah Gunje such as had never been remembered before, tempered, as it might well be, to those in whose memories the recollection of the dead was fresh and vivid.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NAWAB'S TERROR.

THE next few days were a busy time. Not only had the exactions made from the people to be repaid, but the new levies to be, in some degree, organised and fitted for service. Some of the old police had proved unfaithful, and had gone over to the Nawab or Rajah Hurpál Singh; but many had been true, who now joined Mr. Brandon, and assisted him in his new formation. Bulram Singh and another landholder provided four guns, the two lightest of which were prepared for active service; the others were to be left at Shah Gunje, with Temple, who, Narendra declared, must be his guest till his tents could arrive. As to Ram Das's connection with Azrácl Pandé, the books captured furnished ample proof of their mutual transactions, and were therefore sealed up, to be opened only when the case should be tried by Mr. Mostyn. Ram Das himself, made no admission whatever; he preserved a sullen silence, and was removed

to the guard-room of the court-house till he could be sent to Noorpoor.

So far all was settled at Shah Gunje; and Baba Sahib, who had been unable to remain inactive at Noorpoor, accompanied by several of the native clerks, soon tried to make his way to Shah Gunje, and to take his part in the work with his usual zeal. Under his assistance, an effective administrative establishment was speedily constructed; those who had hidden themselves in terror from the Moulvee, now rejoined the service; and public business was in such active progress that Cyril could no longer delay, for the opportunity was admirable. Hurpál Singh had gone to join another rebel Rajah at some distance, with all his levies. There were already rumours of the advance of several English armies, and since Dehly had fallen, and the English had recovered strength, it was becoming evident to all waverers, that now was the time to assume a loyal demeanour.

Leaving Temple therefore, with directions for every emergency, Mr. Brandon pressed on through the country, not only delivering the people from petty local oppressors, but re-establishing the authority of Government soundly and satisfactorily; and it was a great assurance to him to find how deeply the people rejoiced in the return to

old laws and customs. They might be hard; they might be unsympathetic; but they were just. They furnished personal and general security, and the tyranny of the strong over the weak was at an end. Cyril's progress, was indeed almost a triumphal procession. At every village he was met by the women, singing hymns, bearing water-pots and garlands, and waving trays over him in which were lighted lamps and offerings. Where there were musicians they played before him, as at a marriage feast. Here and there some slight resistance was encountered, or there were little skirmishes; but they did not hinder the main object of the tour, which was effective and encouraging.

From Noorpoor, too, the news was satisfactory. Mr. Noble, with Hobson, a native assistant, and some volunteers from the police and the Sepoys, had made two successful sallies, and beaten the Nawab's posts out of several considerable places in what had been Mr. Noble's portion of the district. Then the Brigadier himself had made a forced march upon the greater part of the Nawab's army, and forced it to retreat; for while men were stirring around them, it was no easy matter to hold the English soldiers in an inactive position; and on a good opportunity occurring,

they were treated to a dash against the Pandies, and enjoyed it. There was no denying, however, that the Nawab's army was still strong; and for the present it was not deemed advisable to attack Futtehpoor, or to show how few soldiers could be spared for field operations. But the rapid re-establishment of the civil power was a contingency for which Nawab Dil Khan had not been prepared; and the practical exposition of it to which Mr. Brandon resorted, was as unexpected as it was very decidedly unpleasant.

It was quite within the province of the Commissioner of the district, in the latitude of action which all civil authorities then possessed, to offer a high reward for the Nawab's apprehension; and a proclamation, in the local vernacular language, was put in circulation, to the effect, 'that Nawab Dil Khan Bahadoor, of Futtehpoor, having wantonly rebelled against the English, attacked Noorpoor, with the intention of destroying all the English there, and carrying off certain ladies; taken possession of British districts, plundered their treasuries, and in several instances (detailed) put to death the local officers in charge of them—and with much more to the same purport, which need not be particularised — was therefore a rebel; and that for his apprehension' (Baba Sahib's

opinion being, that the words 'for his head' should be added) 'the sum of five thousand rupees was offered, with a free pardon—unless they had committed murder—to all who might apprehend him, and bring him to Noorpoor.'

No sooner was this written, than Buldeo and Foorsut, ever ready for any desperate enterprise, volunteered to attach copies to the very gates of the Nawab's fort; and they performed this feat in the most approved Dacoit fashion. Foorsut well knew the secret staircase from the well, and led Buldeo up by it at night, till they fairly entered the Nawab's hall of audience, and stuck one of the papers against the wall in a conspicuous place, with others against the gates outside; and no doubt the practice of their old profession had very considerably conduced to their success.

While the brothers were returning to Mr. Brandon's camp, great was the consternation at Futtehpoor. As he awoke in the morning—for the Nawab, after his defeat, had returned to his castle some days before—the proclamation was brought to him by an attendant, who, when he entered the hall of audience early, in order to sweep it, had found the document stuck against the wall, over the Nawab's customary seat, and was horribly alarmed. Nor was the Nawab less so. There

was no doubt of its authenticity. The seal of the Commissioner of the Noorpoor Province was attested by the 'Cyril Brandon' of the Commissioner himself, about which there could be no mistake whatever. Everybody knew those bold, yet delicate characters. Above all thoughts which now peculiarly disturbed the Nawab, were two: first, the conviction that his deed of promise to Azráel Pandé had fallen into Mr. Brandon's possession, and could be used against him. All he might urge in extenuation was, the fact that the writing had been extorted from him by Azráel, who had gained access to him as he slept, and holding a dagger to his heart, had forced him to write as he dictated. But as, unfortunately, no one could prove this, it might not be believed. Then the secret entrances to his castle had been discovered by some one, and Dil Khan felt that at any moment, even Mr. Brandon himself, pistol in hand, might come up the staircase and slay him. It was of little avail, for comfort, that the Nawab directed the archway opened by Azráel Pandé to be re-closed: the horrible proclamation became an actual terror, which possessed him night and day, and scared away sleep; a terror which no one could comfort, no one mitigate. It was as if the words of his wife, the 'Star of Women,' were

becoming true; that he would be a fugitive, and that in the hour of his trouble no one would help him.

Help him! Who was there to do so, now? Colonel Goor Bux had long ago taken all military authority out of his hands. He, the Soobadar Major of the rebel —th, and the Rissaldar of the cavalry, did as they pleased, took what money they pleased, and spent it as they pleased. Indeed it was hard for them, except by largesses, to hold their men together, in the face of the news from Dehly, and other news too, which followed fast and thick. They were already thinking, and more than thinking, of deserting the Nawab and following the rebel armies to Jhansy, or elsewhere. And, if they left him, what chance was there of meeting, even for a day, any onset by the Brigadier, or even by Mr. Brandon, whose levies were driving all before them? No more ghastly fiend —Ghoul or Jinn—could even the sorcerers of his faith have called up from the realm of spirits, than this horrible proclamation. Comfort, he had found none. One wife had already betaken herself to Dehly, to prepare the way, as she said, for her lord's reception by the 'King of Kings.' The other, more faithful, and secure in her local influence, had told him that she should remain and

claim the protection of the English; and urged him, with many prayers and tears, to do the same. But the Nawab was, alas! too far—too deeply committed—for that; and the proclamation, staring him in the face as it lay before him, forbade a thought of surrender. There was only one alternative, it seemed—to rejoin his army, then lying at the frontier of the Noorpoor province, and to lead it, yes, to lead it to Jhansy to join the Ranee! 'Colonel' Goor Bux would, he knew, coincide with him in this, as their best course; and now he had no other adviser. The Moulvee was dead; all his schemes were dead. The province of which he had assumed the rulership was a phantom to the Nawab which was melting away. Máma Jumeela was dead. Azráel Pandé was dead; but his fearful secrets were not dead, and there was the proclamation which told its own story in proof of them. For five thousand rupees anyone might betray him, and lead him away captive to Noorpoor, where a traitor's doom awaited him—a parade of white faces, a loaded cannon, or the hangman with a rope!

Could he contrast this with what he might have been, had he remained steadfast to the English, and not shiver to his very marrow? His ancestral dominions safe, and increased by his generous

friends! Honours and congratulations showered upon him. Visiting the Brigadier and Mr. Mostyn, with the certainty that he had aided Mr. Brandon or Mr. Noble—that he had beaten away the rebels from his gates—would have been very different to what he must endure now, if he went as a mean suppliant for his life! I say, with all these miseries gnawing at his heart, it could hardly be otherwise, than that the Nawab followed the course of escaping from present dread, rather than that of meeting those whom he had enraged; and one morning, riding at early dawn from his castle, they heard a few days after, at Noorpoor, that his whole force had left the province, and was on its way to one of the head-quarters of the rebel army.

Then, indeed, the district was once more free, though, as yet, not entirely, of rebel influences; and gradually the posts were re-established, and news came in from many parts, which told them at Noorpoor what had been done elsewhere, and what was doing in the great war, and set their hearts at rest as to the final issue. Very gradually Cyril Brandon had worked round towards Futtehpoor; and when his camp was within a few miles of the castle, he received a letter from the Khánum Sahiba, the 'star among women,' praying to be

taken under English protection; that the Nawab had gone away—where, she knew not—and that no Sepoys nor any army were there—no one; in fact, in charge of the place but her own personal retainers, who were true to the English, as she was herself, and had been from the first. There was no doubting the sincerity of this profession; and as Baba Sahib had ascertained its correctness from other sources, Cyril marched at once to the castle, and was admitted to the hall of audience, at a door of which, behind a screen, sat the poor lady weeping, and unable to speak much; but, consoled by Mr. Brandon, was not as yet entirely in despair. At her request, Cyril continued certain of the civil officers in local employment, and the household, who were faithful to their mistress, remained as before. But a proclamation was issued, that the Nawab's estate was under attachment, and that authority in it belonged to the Commissioner of Noorpoor until the pleasure of Government was made known.

'There are two men whom I have had a long time in confinement, Mr. Brandon, in one of the secret dungeons, who entreat to be taken to you,' said the Kotwal of the town; 'they tell me they were Dacoits, with one Azráel Pandé who was their leader. They do not know whether he is

alive or dead; but they can give you important information about him, and about the Dacoity at Gokulpoor. Will you see them? They have been well cared for, but secreted by the Nawab for about two years; I infer, therefore, that they were of some importance.'

See them? Of course he would see them! Why, this was another of the wonderful events of the time! and Buldeo was sent with the Kotwal to bring the men. In a short time Buldeo returned, crying and laughing like a child. 'They are Sumbho and Govinda,' he exclaimed; 'so long lost! Ah, they will tell you all about the murder of Huree Das, at last!'

As he spoke, the men entered, their heavy irons clanking as they moved, and fell down before Cyril, who was in the hall of audience. They were pale from long confinement and inaction, and dazzled by the light of day; but they were perfectly collected, and told their story with simplicity and truthfulness which could not be mistaken. We know all about that sad matter already, and need not recapitulate it. These men were the two scouts whom Azráel had employed; who had brought Ram Das to the waterfall at night, had heard his proposal and Azráel's acceptance of it; who had returned to Gokulpoor with him, and,

assisted by him, had concealed themselves behind some cotton bales, and opened the gate for the Dacoits when the time came. Thus, all was revealed which had lain hid so long! What a strange, painful drama it had been! with only Seeta's life shining out of the gloom, as it were, a vision of a bright jewel in a horrible dream.

They were longing at Noorpoor to see Cyril, and he had arranged to be with them at Christmas. Mr. Mostyn had already had a new roof put upon his house, and it was quite habitable and comfortable; but Cyril's was still a ruin. Do we remember the previous Christmas? It will not, I think, have been forgotten; and the conversation between the friends, and many other circumstances which then happened, when Seeta was there too, and they all began to know her. Well, a year was gone—a year of tumult and horror. But, though one victim had been claimed, the evil shadow of Sumbut, 1914, was already departing, and though the weird year must inevitably fulfil its character of blood, yet it would be that of cruel enemies, who had brought retribution on themselves for many a dastardly act of murder; and not the blood of those whom Azrael Pandé had doomed when he made his address to the Thirty-fourth at Barrackpoor. All of them were

safe now, except such as might fall in the ordinary course of war. No more helpless women and children, thank God, would perish in hideous massacre!

As Cyril Brandon rode into Noorpoor early on Christmas morning, did he remember his last ride by that road, and his companion then? I do not think he had forgotten either; but the last wound was open, and bleeding still, and Grace Mostyn was but as a sister. He was a good deal changed, too, in many respects. More resolute, for the exercise of independent action and responsibility, involve, or perhaps beget, resolution—more confident in himself, and more thoroughly imbued with a knowledge and conviction of the value of her who had so miserably perished in saving him. Would they have forgotten her? Not so, he thought; nor was he mistaken. Seeta's memory was very precious among her friends, and their conversation often turned upon the strange incidents of her life, and her last act of devotion and love.

Yes, it was a very affectionate, pleasant meeting, a very happy one I might say, though the reminiscences to Cyril Brandon were inexpressibly painful, and they grew upon him day after day, more than was good for him. He could not walk

through his garden, or see the blackened ruins of Seeta's pretty cottage, he could not be in the drawing-room of the Judge's house—without remembering the sudden burst of Seeta from the dining-room, while her sudden piercing cry to escape seemed to ring in his ears; nor could he go down the steps in front, without having the whole scene of that horrible night repeated. It was almost worse at first if he went up to the fort; but after a few days he felt he had rather live where Seeta died than be always with the Mostyns, with whom his presence seemed, he thought, to be a sort of constraint. And he could be freer to do his work, too, by himself. With Grace Mostyn, so long as Seeta lived, he had been on the terms of a brother with a sister. Now that was changed, for the object of common interest and love no longer existed, and the heart which had once resisted temptation was now stronger than ever, entrenched, as it were, behind a rampart of grief, which, though neither morbid nor intrusive, could not at once give way.

Noorpoor was not a gay station, by any means, that Christmas; indeed, I hardly care to write how dull it was. Some of the residents had gone to their bungalows in the cantonment; others, whose houses had been burnt, remained in the

fort with the Brigadier and his staff. Noble came in to eat his Christmas dinner with the Mostyns. All were thankful, no doubt; but dulness prevailed, for even petty squabbles had departed before want of exciting causes, and the absence of home news. And that, when it came at last, was an event never to be forgotten. Months had passed since those beleaguered in Noorpoor had received letters. Now there was news of children, of wives, of parents, of friends; some joyful, some sorrowful, some painful and hard to bear, but better than the suspense which had existed before; and they heard too, often, of the exertions that England was making for all, and how the evil tidings of rebellion and massacre had been received.

Cyril's letters were very varied. There was at first a complaint about his brother's health; but in the latter ones there was much anxiety both on his mother's part and on his sister's. They were now at Cannes, and had taken a villa there for the season, that is, from November till March. 'Mentone was thought too relaxing, and John does not like it,' wrote Lady Hylton. 'The place is too quiet for him. Here, at any rate, we have plenty of friends, and he can get as much riding as is good for him; and really it is very pleasant, though *I am* anxious, because the doctors plainly told me,

and told him, that he *must not* risk another winter in England. If we were only as little anxious about you; but I am comforted by what —— tells me, that you are not in the disturbed parts of India, and will not be affected by the mutiny of the Sepoys. If I thought you were, I am sure I should never sleep," &c. &c.

The last of his mother's envelopes, a fortnight later, was of a different nature. I need not quote the whole of it; but between her thoughts that the news she had received was true, and the increasing evil tidings from India, poor Lady Hylton had written in evident anguish, 'I received the enclosed by the last mail,' Lady Hylton wrote, 'and you can only estimate faintly, how it has distressed and grieved me. Whether the writer's insinuation that the native connection you have formed is a permanent one, is true or not, I have no means of judging. An old friend, ——, who knows Indian customs well, says it cannot be permanent, and that temporary *liaisons* are only too common; but, O, my dear son, that any scandal of this kind should be spread about you, cuts me to the heart, and I cannot bear it. I dare not tell the matter to Augusta, and when I mentioned it to your brother, he flushed very much, and said he would not write to you, but I might, as it would

have more effect. O Cyril! I have *so* trusted you since you left me, and never, never have I heard a word about you that grieved me. I can bear all this horrible news that comes, for I know you will do your duty wherever you are; but if this abominable scandal be true, it will break my heart.' From his brother, too, there were a few lines:—'Mater will tell you all about me, and I suppose I must submit to live here till spring to please her and the doctors. As to Augusta, she is perfectly happy, and indulges in as many flirtations as she conveniently can. You will see that some very particular friend of yours has written to mother about what you confided to me. Do satisfy her, like a dear fellow, for I foresee that she will be miserable if you don't—and that by return mail. Take care of yourself; and I think if you can get a lick at those Pandies, you won't let it pass. Somehow or other, I don't feel a bit anxious about you.'

Cyril looked at the envelope enclosed in his mother's letter. The post mark was Calcutta, and the handwriting of the direction he did not know; but the enclosure was very different. There were the peculiar spiky characters of Mrs. Smith, which it was impossible any one could imitate, and the purport of the letter was such a strange, spiteful

mingling of truth and falsehood, piety (after Mrs. Smith's fashion), and irreverence, that I am almost tempted to copy it as a curiosity of literature, but I refrain for many reasons. Possibly there are some of my readers who, hating 'black people,' might enjoy Mrs. Smith's opinion of them, and I should appear to pander to such. There was also a digression upon the morality of Indian females in general, and poor Sceta's in particular, which is too prurient to be sufficiently decent to transcribe, and which, of course, was written in 'the very strictest confidence.'

Cyril was reading this in the octagon room when Philip Mostyn entered, who saw at once the angry flush on his friend's cheek, and in conjunction with the pile of English letters on the table, thought it might be some family matter; but Cyril undeceived him at once. 'Read that,' he said, 'about my poor girl. I found out Mrs. Smith once before, and, like a fool, forgave her; but she shall not escape me this time. Think, Philip, what agony it has been to me to read that, here where my darling's pure spirit passed away.'

Philip Mostyn read the letter slowly, and Cyril saw the tears well up in his eyes as he did so. 'She would have forgiven her as she did the ruffian who murdered her, Cyril,' he said at length,

solemnly. 'If Seeta were alive, I should say nothing; but as she is gone to her rest, I plead for her; that this infamous tissue of lies should be forgiven, though it may not be forgotten.'

Cyril looked out through the oriel window towards the placid lake, blue and crisped by the slight breeze that blew across it, and, far away, the hills were dimmed in the soft haze. He did not speak for some time, but the appeal from his friend, so tenderly given in her name, had not been lost upon him. 'For her sweet memory's sake, Philip,' he said at last, 'which should not be blurred, even by a thought—God help me—I do forgive this. I had thought of sending it to the writer's husband, but——' and he took the letter and tore it into the smallest fragments, which fluttered down to the water in a white shower. 'Let it pass now——now that my darling is at rest.'

CHAPTER XIV.

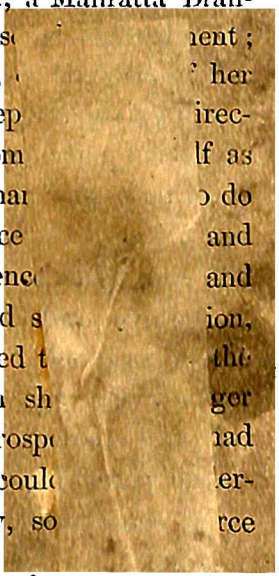
THE RANEE OF JHANSY.

When the Nawab Dil Khan and his army arrived at Jhansy, the British forces, under Sir Hugh Rose (Lord Strathnairn), were sweeping all before them to the southward, while Madras troops, under General Whitlock, were carrying war further to the east into the territories of the Rajah of Banpoor and the Nawab of Banda. From the north-west, strong columns were pursuing a flying enemy down the banks of the Jumna towards Kalpee; and others were already assembling from the eastward for a last attack upon Lükhnow. Thus while this tale does not, as I have before said, profess to give the history of the period which historians have provided, it seems needful to mention in some part, and briefly, what was being done to them in the rebel Sepoy army and its allies; and among those operations, Jhansy was soon to be the scene of one of the most brilliant achievements of that very exciting period of the war.

It does not appear to me that Nawab Dil Khan had in any degree improved his position by the march to Jhansy. He had been carried thither by his fears rather than his hopes. Behind him he saw disgrace and ruin, nay, even death, which there was no apparent means of escaping; before him—well, his 'Kismut' or fate, whatever that might be. I have before said that the Nawab was no warrior; he had no experience of leading armies or of fighting battles; and he had already seen that a mere handful of British troops, English and native, had been able to drive his own forces from a strong position, and that his few guns had been saved with difficulty. There was no good accord between the leaders of his forces; and, as it neared its destination, the mutineers of Noorpoor had separated, the majority under the Rissáldar and the Soobadar Major of the —th, preparing to join the Nana Sahib's army which lay at Kalpee, under Tantia Topee, who was preparing to support the Rance.

'Colonel' Goor Bux and the Nawab therefore, with the guns and the irregular levies, duly arrived at their destination; and the former was heartily welcomed; for there was no doubt that he was a brave and efficient officer, practically acquainted with his professional duty, and as such

needful to the Ranee in case her strong fort should be attacked. But Dil Khan had no qualifications to make him welcome; nor indeed had he rank or wealth to help her cause in any way. He had notoriously failed to hold his ground in the Noorpoor district, through which British armies were now sweeping with resistless force; but he had brought some guns, of which perhaps she had enough already, and as he presented the hilt of his sword to the undaunted woman, and offered his poor services against their mutual enemies, the English, the tone of his reception did not encourage him.

The Ranee, Lukshmee Bye, a Mahratta Brahmin, had no affectation of pers  ient; and she sat daily on the seat, her deceased husband, receiving rep irections, hearing petitions, and com lf as a brave and determined woma o do in her position. In appearance and handsome: with a noble presenc and a dignified and resolute, indeed s ion, which appeared to have usurped t the peculiar softness which, when sh ger and had good hope of a prosp ad distinguished her. Dil Khan coul er-stand the sometimes dreamy, so ree

expression of her beautiful eyes. She had bade him be seated apart as she was engaged with others; and that presently, she would converse with him.

Dil Khan felt himself very lonely in that busy place. No one came to speak with him; people passed and repassed, and the men with silver maces scowled at his own mace-bearers as though they had no business to show themselves there. For a time a burly Mussulman, with a strong black beard and coarse hands, who looked like a truculent butcher, but who declared himself to have been a 'Doctor' under the English, came and sat by him, describing how all the English, men, women, and children, had been taken out to a garden and killed, many by himself: and how he had hacked at the 'Kafirs' till his arm was tired, and sent many, most perhaps, of the seventy-five who perished, 'to hell.' The Nawab remembered the sweet ladies of Noorpoor, and had often noticed many of the fair English children there: and as he heard the grim, hideous recital of the Doctor, he, rebel as he was, in his heart thanked God that he had slain none such as they. There were not many Mussulmans present. The majority of those who came to make their obeisance were Hindoos of various castes, none of

whom noticed him: indeed most seemed to regard him as an interloper who had done nothing, could do nothing, and whom the Ranee Sahiba did not want.

Perhaps there never had been a time since he left Futtehpoor, when remembrances of its former peace and security came home so vividly to the Nawab's mind. As he closed his eyes he could see, as if from his seat in the oriel window, his gardens and rich sugar-cane fields, and the blue hills beyond, soft, and dreamily glowing in the sun. He could hear the music which played over his castle gate at stated times of the day, and came up softly through the courts and halls. He missed his familiar gossips, the town Moulveds, and some of the bankers and landholders, who used to drop in and chat with him. Then there was peace, now there was war; but he had won no glory, did not seem likely to win any, and was to all intents and purposes a fugitive. He had promised himself to go to Dehly to salute the 'King of Kings' sitting in pomp upon his throne, as his ancestors had done: now he had to salute an 'Infidel' Ranee, whose rank was not as high as his own. The English had of course attacked and taken his domains. Could he now win them back? Could this Ranee help him? Ah, no!

not now that the English seemed stronger than ever, with tens of thousands of English soldiers fresh from their country. It would be all the Ranee could do to keep her own: and, indeed, there appeared little chance of that, if what his servants told him were true. As he thought of these things, sitting alone in the great hall of the Ranee's palace, tears, very bitter tears, welled up in his eyes, and there was a painful lump in his throat which would not subside; but at last his turn came, and a mace-bearer, roughly to his perception, told him to 'get up,' that the Lady Ranee would allow him to speak with her, and conducted him to the Royal daïs, by which he seated himself, having again offered the hilt of his sword as a Nuzzur, or offering, which the Ranee touched lightly with her soft, beautiful hand.

'Be at your ease, Nawab Sahib,' she said, in good Hindee, for she affected not to speak the courtly Oordoo, though she understood it perfectly. 'Tell me about yourself. I have often heard my lord husband speak of your gallant father. What have the English done to you that you are here with me, their enemy, and have left your fair domain? Where are your children?'

'I have no children, lady,' he replied, sadly.

The Ranee had touched a painful chord in the man's feelings. 'I have no children.'

'I see,' she continued. 'Then they, the English, would not let you adopt, and you are like me?'

'I did not ask them, lady.'

'Nay, then, by the holy Mother Gunga!' she exclaimed, sharply, 'thou hadst no wrong done thee. Was it not greed of power that led thee on to rebel, not loss of honour?'

'I fought, as my forefathers did, for the Faith, and for the "Asylum of the World," who conferred rank and my own province on me,' returned Dil Khan, doggedly.

'A poor reed to lean on, Nawab,' she said, scornfully; 'a poor reed; a flickering torch, which has gone out with an evil stink, and will never be kindled again. Ah, sir! with no wrong to redress, with no honour lost, with your faith pledged to those for whom your ancestors fought and had served; with a fine ancestral castle and estate—methinks it was a traitor's part to leave them for a phantom. Had I been like thee, the red flag of the English, which their Lord Sahib gave to my husband, and which has been soaked in English gore, had now been flying from the fort above us; and I, weak woman as I am,

would have fought for them. No harm should have come near them that I, Lukshmee Bye, could have prevented. I would have taken those Englishwomen and their babes to my breast and held them there, truly and safely; while their husbands should have kept them and me against all enemies. Yes, I would have done this, Nawab, if they had been true.'

'Yet all who are here—died—were slain—lady——'

It was perilous ground to tread upon; but the Nawab's spirit had risen. He had never before been so addressed or reproached by a woman. If he were a traitor, she was a vindictive murderess.

'Slain? Yes,' she exclaimed, with her eyes flashing and her lips quivering, 'I was childless, like you, and spared none—no, not one! Do you know the history of our house? No? Well, listen. We declared for the English when their power hurled back the Mahrattas of the Dekhan. They had crushed Dehly, and that high station they could not maintain. We of Jhansy might have lost all then; but the English of that time were just and merciful, and continued to our house all it had gained. We were honoured by them, and we were loyal. We loved the English;

we hoisted their flag over our own; and it would have been there now, had their old justice been continued to us. My dear lord died, and he had no children. I asked and pleaded, in his dying words, to adopt a boy who should inherit what had been once freely given; but this was refused; our little petition was rejected. The English, with all the empire of Dehly belonging to them, refused to continue what they themselves had once granted to us freely and generously. But these men now are not like their former princely heroes; they are a mean, covetous race; farming our country from their Government, seizing every scrap of land, every rupee of revenue they can, to swell their enormous gains. When we heard of Nagpoor and Sattara, we were touched for the fate of our royal houses; but we said, in our simple, blind confidence, "These great acts cannot affect us, for we have been loyal and true, and the English flag flies from our towers." And yet—and yet—they did not spare us. They offered me and mine a pension. A pension! I say it was an insult: mean, cruel, and deliberate. Should we have honour if we were pensioned? Should we have self-respect? I tell thee, no! I would rather have shaved my head and wandered on foot as a poor Bairagin, begging my way from

shrine to shrine all over Hind, denouncing these English as tyrants and oppressors, than taken the crumb they flung to me—as to a dog. 'But there was one thing that came into my heart instead—one thing for which I waited, Nawab Sahib—we could have revenge; and therefore I had them slain. They were ruling where I ruled; they were collecting my money, they were changing the old customs of my people, they were corrupting our priestly caste.'

'There [redacted]once, before Sumbut 1914 began,' she continued, in a lower tone, 'a holy Brahmin, a man who recited the "Mysteries of Kalee Mata," who told us the truth; yea, in this hall he told it fearlessly. He had wandered many years preaching the same; but my husband's heart turned not toward him. But when he came to me, in my gloom and misery, and told me what the English had done—what they were doing, what they purposed to do to all Hind—to sweep away all royalties, and all caste—I, a Brahmin woman, lone and childless, joined my tears and my prayers to his. He cried, "There shall be no English! Kalee Mata has given them to us, that she may drink their blood." And when the time came and the signal, all here died—every one. Not in war, with honour, but like sheep, victims of a sacrifice

to the "Mother." I say one and all they died, and their blood flowed, and their English flag was dipped in it, and hangs black and stiff on the walls. Dost thou understand now, Nawab, why they were slain?'

'I had the same Brahmin with me, lady. His name was ——'

'Do not mention it, sir,' she exclaimed, moving her hand impatiently, and seeming to shudder. 'He comes to me when I call, and asks for blood. All the rites he taught me call for blood—well, the "Mother" may have it still, and take mine in the end; but death is sweeter than dishonour; and if I win, Khan Sahib!—if we, the Mahrattas, win, there may be a Péshwah at Poona, though there will be no Emperor at Dehly. Now go, sir; your quarters are allotted to you, and the duty of your men. For yourself, you will receive the daily rations of your rank while you stay.'

'I expected to have heard Azráel's cry of "Hrrám! Hrrám! Hrrám!"' said the Nawab to Goor Bux afterwards. 'Is she, too, mad, like him? Thirsting for blood?'

"'It is not her wont,' replied the 'Colonel.' 'The people speak of her as gentle and loving once; but the English have wronged her deeply, and she has thrown away her scabbard. Some-

times she weeps floods of tears; but more frequently she is, as you saw her to-day, brooding over her wrongs and her revenge, gloomy and vindictive, a very tigress at heart; so, beware of her!'

Lukshmee Bye was not long in suspense. On the 23rd March, 1858, as Sumbut 1914 had just closed, the English army she had heard of so long, encamped over against her fort, drove in all the outposts, and the siege commenced. 'Colonel' Goor Bux knew very well what English guns were, and English shells and shot; and though his own materiel of war was indifferent, he fought his batteries with the devotion of a good soldier, worthy of a better cause and fate. No hiding for any one now; and Dil Khan began to see and feel what English war in earnest, meant. A portion of the wall was allotted to him to defend, and he did his duty doggedly, for there was no shelter, and no retreat. The English guns came nearer and nearer; and the wall crumbled away under the storm of shot, while almost every gun on the fort walls was by turns dismounted or disabled. 'No matter what we lose,' said the Rance's officers, 'if we can but hold the place till our friends relieve us; then, between two fires, our turn will come, and they cannot escape us.' Night after

night, Lukshmee Bye watched from the highest tower of the fort; but there was no signal, had they left her to perish?

Not so, they were doing their best to save her. Twenty thousand men with twenty English guns, were marching upon Jhansy with all practicable speed. The Ranee herself had at least ten thousand within the fort, and the plan of battle had been deftly arranged. While Tantia Topee was attacking the rear of the British position, the Ranee's troops were to sally in their front; and with a throbbing but exulting heart Lukshmee Byes at waiting for the blaze of the fire which was to prove that her succour had arrived. Nor was she disappointed. As her friends crossed the Betwah river, a bright light shot up into the sky, which confirmed every hope, and aroused her for the first struggle near the town, in which she should strike in, leading her men to victory!

But this was not to be. A veteran intelligence, far superior to any she could command, was directing the siege: and the rebel plan was frustrated by a daring movement, of which there are few examples in war. While the siege operations progressed as usual, a body of 1,200 men, all that were available, were posted by night on the road to the river, and as the rebel columns came up,

the battle began. For a time the struggle was fierce; but the result was never doubtful. Not only was the rebel host defeated with the heavy loss of 1,500 disciplined men dead on the field, but with that of all its guns, and chased away till the exhausted troops could follow no further. Then the siege of Jhansy was pressed more closely than before.

On the 3rd of April, 1858, the town was stormed, and the English troops had taken up their position in a part of the place, preparing for the final assault on the fort on the morrow. Had the Ranee any hope? Perhaps the messengers she sent for terms might have told her there was none, had they returned; but there were few spared at Jhansy when the past was remembered; and when no messengers returned, she knew their fate.

Nothing now but flight. Some devoted men still defended the walls of the rock fort, who said they would die there to cover the retreat of their beloved mistress; and through the night of the 3rd of April the English shells rained upon that part of the town and fort which the enemy still held. By daylight, all must be decided, and there was no hope of defence now.

Was Dil Khan to stay or to fly? He seemed to be

so stupefied by what was passing around him, by the noise of the crashing fire, and by the sight of the hundreds, nay thousands, of dead and dying wretches; by the sight of English faces within the walls—that he was passive in the hands of his servants, who were watching what might be done; and there were already rumours that the Rance would fly. They had the Nawab's horse saddled, and he himself sat, with his loins girded, praying to be led out of that hell of shot and human suffering.

At last, while yet much of night remained, one of the gates in a secluded part of the fortifications was opened, and a sad procession issued forth. The Rance and her sister, or companion, dressed like men, with a few of her own chosen retainers, rode silently from the portal, into the gloom beyond, and were followed by Dil Khan and such of his men as could escape. No one spoke, except in whispers, and the gate was closed and barred as the last man passed out. It was to be a ride for life that night; for the English cavalry patrols of the 14th Dragoons, and the Hyderabad contingent, were everywhere vigilant; and to meet any of them, was to ensure certain death. How these were evaded, was never ascertained; but the Rance had perfect guides, she was a fearless rider, and she pressed on at a rapid pace into the

rough, jungly country, in which her best safety lay.

But not without pursuit: for the fact that she had fled was soon known to the cavalry patrols from the crowds of soldiers who were now escaping from the doomed city, and who were being pursued and sabred in all directions. One of these patrols fell upon the Ranee's track; and at one time she was in sight upon her grey horse, attended by a few followers; but the pursuers had already ridden twenty-one miles; their horses were exhausted, their officer badly wounded, and the gallant Hyderabad cavalry were obliged to abandon what they could not continue, and Lukshmee Bye escaped.

In that hot, frightful night, Dil Khan fared badly. He kept up with the Ranee for some time, with a few mounted followers, who dropped off gradually, one by one. His own fat, pampered horse, splendid indeed to see as he caracoled in a procession, was in ill condition for such a ride. Again and again the Ranee and her retainers called to him to come on, but in vain: and at last he found himself abandoned by all. Then he lost his way in some jungle, and wandered about till it was daylight. It seemed that he had ridden back towards Jhansy; for as he

ascended a low hill, he saw the rock fort at only a few miles distance, and the red ensign of England fluttering in the hot sun-light from the highest tower of the citadel. Jhansy then was no place for him, unless he gave himself up; and then ——. Ah, there was no hope, no refuge now! None but in God! And the miserable man dismounted from his panting horse, and spreading his waist-band on the ground, knelt down mechanically to perform the morning prayer of his faith. He was wearied out, physically and mentally, and parched with thirst. As he lay down after his prayer, he fell into a troubled sleep, and mocking visions of his quiet castle, his gentle wife, and of the fierce Dacoit, seemed to come to him; and the very 'Hrrám! Hrrám! Hrrám!' of his unholy rites rang in his ears.

Suddenly his horse neighed, and he awoke: and raising himself up on his arm, he saw that a body of cavalry, scouring the country for the escaped Ranee, were upon him. He drew his sword, but the blow he made at the first dragoon was parried, and a moment after he was laid low by a sabre thrust, and sinking at his horse's feet, died without a groan.

It was evident that he was a man of rank, and he might have been saved had the English officer

been near. But there was no quarter given at Jhansy, and Dil Khan had asked for none. He had died, like a soldier, with his sword in his hand. Then his body was searched for papers, and perhaps for valuables also. But he had carried nothing on his person. All he possessed was in the saddle-bags of poor Mótee, who was led off, and duly entered in the ranks of Her Majesty's Dragoons. The papers found were of no consequence, further than to tell who he was, and after a time, Mr. Brandon received official intimation of the Nawab Dil Khan's death.

I need not follow the fortunes of the Ranee of Jhansy, who has no other connection with this tale than as regards the Nawab. But she joined Tantia Topee, again defeated at Koonch, and in the subsequent operations proved to be the most untiring, and perhaps the ablest of the rebel leaders who captured Gualior, and obliged its ruler, Sindia, to fly. But her triumph was of short continuance; and in the successful attack upon the rebel army at Gualior, on the 17th June, she, and her sister, or companion, were slain, being dressed like men, in a charge made by the 8th Hussars, of which regiment Sir Hugh Rose wrote: 'One most important result was the death of the Ranee of Jhansy, who, although a lady, was the ablest and bravest military leader of the rebels.'

CHAPTER XV.

PARTING.

It was no time for delay at Noorpoor; and when the Christmas week had passed, and the greetings of the new year had been exchanged, Cyril left his friends for his district work, which, indeed, needed all his time and ability. His official communications had been re-opened, and his nomination of young Temple as an extra assistant commissioner confirmed. Nor was Baba Sahib forgotten, for the same despatch brought his appointment as 'extra assistant' also; while the eminent services all had rendered to Government at a most critical period, were impressively recorded in a State minute forwarded to Cyril by his friend, whose letters on a former occasion we know of, and for which the high official tendered his sincere apologies. 'Nothing, my dear Brandon,' he wrote, 'vexes me more than that I should have been so misled as to consider them as much necessary for the public welfare as your own; and

from our mutual friend, Mostyn; I now know the truth, and the miserable catastrophe that ensued, in which, believe me, you have my very sincere sympathy.

I have said before, that the week preceding January, 1858, had been a dull one; very dull, to all or most of our friends. There was no music, for the piano was found to have been warped by the heat of the conflagration of the Judge's house, and was, for the time, useless, and was to be sent home for repair. Even had it been in order, I think those who would have sung to it were out of tune also, for no attempt was made to renew the old, pleasant practices; and though other pianos were offered, none were accepted. The memory of the dangers all had escaped had not passed away with victory, now everywhere progressing. But Sunbut 1914 would yet die in blood, according to the old weird prediction a hundred years before.

As to poor Grace, she longed to be away. How much she had been distressed by offers which she was obliged to refuse, all through that weary time in the old fort, I will not reveal; nor is it fitting to mention those who had made pretensions to her hand. Was it because of objection to her successive admirers, or did the reasons for her

refusals lie deeper? If they did, and I believe she did, she saw no hope. Cyril Brandon was kind and even affectionate; but Grace saw that time, a long time, perhaps, would be needed to reconcile him to the loss of one whom they had both loved so dearly; and she could only hope, dimly indeed, but yet hope. There was, however, no apparent opening for any change by absence from Noorpoor. Mr. Mostyn had again pressed his wife and Grace to go to the hills for the ensuing hot weather, but in vain; nor was the condition of the country sufficiently settled in the direction they would have to travel, to warrant such an undertaking as a long journey; nor, truly, was Mrs. Mostyn herself equal to it, so they remained. And as Cyril Brandon left them, it was with the certainty that they should meet again.

Perhaps I need hardly follow Cyril Brandon into his district occupations. They had not changed, nor had his habits of hard work and assiduity, which have been already recorded. There was much to repair, some still prevailing lawlessness to overcome, and sullen minds to be reconciled to the existing necessities of the time; but there were few who could resist the influence of his genial nature and true popularity. Firm,

, and devoted to the best interests of the people he ruled over; confident, yet deliberate in his acts and judgments, he was at once loved and respected by the loyal, while his name was a terror to evil-doers. The secret of his success, if it can be called one, lay in his true sympathy with all classes, and his ready attention to all demands on his time and patience. Many an old feud had broken out afresh, many a dispute, long ago settled, had been renewed fiercely in the confusion that had prevailed; many a family litigation for lands or divisions of inheritance, which had slumbered for years, had been revived so long as might made right, and all had to be re-adjusted.

Those only know who have experienced them, how deeply and distressingly such disturbances of public feeling and security as had occurred affect the rural population of India, and how obstinate are the prejudices and antipathies which have to be reconciled or overcome; and yet, in some respects, Cyril Brandon found himself gaining a truer and deeper knowledge of the real opinions, dispositions, and requirements of the people, than in previous years of smooth, eventless progression which, too often, had concealed festering sores beneath. Mr. Brandon could see very plainly

that the discontent, in many localities, [redacted] real ground of existence, and that the pr[redacted] experience he was gaining would be most valuable aid towards a new settlement of many disputed points; but while he removed all the causes of discontent which lay within his powers, the fuller and more complete re-organisation could only be effected under orders from the Government, which, at present, too deeply occupied by the emergent political affairs of the time, would not be able, for several years to come, perhaps, to bestow the requisite attention upon his own province, one of many, which had been too long neglected.

So he worked and worked: making notes for the report which he would submit when the season was over, obtaining facts, and the opinions and counsels of the most respectable and influential people of the country, adding his own practical suggestions of relief and amendment of administration. But I do not know that many of my readers will care to follow dry details of Indian administration, though they form the soul, as it were, of the vast body they regulate; and it would be well for all if they engaged a deeper share of sympathy and interest, or the English people at large cared to understand, or sought

stand; how, with a few assistants such as I know of—Cyril Brandon, like scores of others, governed hundreds of thousands, or, perhaps, even millions, with a province as large as Wales or Scotland, or one of the divisions of Scotland; and how an aggregate of such men rule the vast population of India, and endeavour, and, it may be hoped, succeed, in securing its good will, and in some, but in rarer cases, its affection. I do not mean to put forward Cyril Brandon as perfection. He had his faults and shortcomings, his struggles, and, in some respects, prejudices to overcome; his regrets that he had left so much undone, and that, after all, he could do so little: but I wish him to be understood as one who had devoted himself to his work. Who, while seeing many serious faults in native character, yet was able to recognise many sterling qualities: as one whose good will, and practical unostentatious benevolence, attracted and secured the love of those he governed—a love which often smoothed away difficulties which, in other indifferent and less sympathising hands, might have been well nigh insurmountable.

And I wish him to be distinguished from those who, having no sympathy with the people they rule over, are haughty or supercilious, uncourteous,

in address and demeanour, forbidding and scorning confidence, entrenched behind native clerks and ministerial officers, and rarely seeing, therefore, with their own eyes, or hearing with their own ears. Such men despise native acquaintance, and make no friends. How should they? Many are excellent officers and administrators of routine duties; but they are those who, some one wisely said, know natives only 'when they are trying them, or taxing them,' and therefore seek no further than to know, and believe in, the worst points of their character. Such men cannot alter, or be altered; but there are many, I trust, who may read these lines, that may not be ashamed to follow Cyril Brandon's example in professing a faith in the people they govern, which leads to kindliness and courtesy of speech and of manner. Time was, when any one in India known to say his prayers, was sneeringly and scornfully called a 'New Light,' as a term of reproach; but men now-a-days, say their prayers more openly than they used to do, and are not reproached, nor would be afraid if they were.

So, after this fashion, I may hope, perhaps, that no false shame or bitter prejudice, may come between their immediate rulers, and the people whom they govern, on the part of the English nation;

and that there may be many, if not all, who do not hesitate to belie the reproach of the great Edmund Burke, that 'young men govern India without society and without sympathy with the natives: an endless, hopeless prospect of new flights of birds of prey ever passing before the eyes of the people!' I will hope too, that the illustrious examples of Elphinstone, Metcalfe, Munro, Malcolm, and a host of others whose names are still household words, invoked when evening lamps are lighted, or sung in the early morning, when the 'two women are sitting grinding at the mill'—may be perpetuated.

But it is not the pride of competitive examination that will do this. It is the manly, simple, kindly minds, which may not be very learned, and need not be: but which, like those of the men I have named, can divest themselves of narrow prejudice, and enter into the feelings and desires of the people without losing their independent thoughts, or positions as English gentlemen.

In his present anxious work, the help of Seeta would have been invaluable to Cyril Brandon: For who, better than she, knew the real wants of the people? And who could lay them before him more freely, or so truly, and so lovingly? Often,

during the unquiet period at Noorpoor, he discussed these matters, and looked hopefully to time when the local troubles past, they could carry on reform freely. As Seeta's mind had expanded and grown in dignity of comprehension, how eloquent an advocate had she become of education of all grades and classes! She had vowed to build and endow a school-house for girls at Shah Gunje; she had a hundred plans in her thoughts of establishing schools for girls and boys in different towns; and truly the hope of directing them was a constant joy! Well, all that was dead and past now; and in the daily life—the studies—the pleasant chatty evenings—the morning ride, and the 'bit of shooting'—with all the protection against lapsing into self, were dead to Cyril also; and the void, which nothing could fill up, was very painful to bear. Even poor little Muff could not forget; and often, as Cyril sat outside in the evening, the fond creature would run into the tent, look round, and return whining, as if asking—as indeed it seemed to be—where his dear mistress was gone!

Mails, and letters from home came now with their accustomed regularity. Lady Hylton had made no further allusion to the anonymous letter; but she was evidently looking for some explana-

of it. This Cyril had given fully and without reserve, in the letter which he wrote in reply to his mother's; and her answer to that, would come soon. Cyril blamed himself much, that he had not written at first explicitly to his mother; but in truth, he feared her repugnance to his having married, what she would call, a heathen, and whilst informing his brother of what he had done, looked hopefully for the time when Seeta should become a Christian, and that he could marry her by the rites of Christian faith. I think he felt too, in a great degree, how difficult, if not impossible, it would have been to reconcile his mother to what he had done, in any case at least not for a long time; and could she, indeed, ever be brought to believe what Seeta really was, unless she saw her? So there had been struggles in many ways, but these, too, were past. In regard to his brother's health, the news was favourable; more so than his mother expected: and they should return to Hylton in the summer, with good hope that the threatened danger was past.

So work went on, patiently and unremittingly, and there was so much to arrange and reorganise, in every county of his province, that Mr. Brandon was hardly sufficient for the task. Perhaps in the rains, he should have more leisure he thought,

and should enjoy the society of his friends; but that was not to be. As the hot weather began, both Mostyn and his wife seemed to give way. Mrs. Mostyn did not gain strength after the birth of her child; and during the rains, and confinement in the fort, Mr. Mostyn had suffered from frequent attacks of low fever, that showed a chronic form, over which medicine had no power; and his strength did not rally. Dr. Home, and another skilful surgeon at Noorpoor, had sat in judgment on Mr. Mostyn's case: and their verdict was, that an immediate return to England was imperative, both for Mrs. Mostyn and himself, and it was clear it could not be delayed. If they went at once, they should avoid the monsoon, and they should reach the Mediterranean by May, and pass the summer in England. Mr. Mostyn had only returned home once since he came out, during a period of nearly twenty years; and the sudden breakdown in his health was a warning which could not be overlooked. He felt that he had not the strength to sit daily at his work, or to write elaborate judgments upon appeal cases, or to compile the statistics of his department; and he knew from the example of many friends, that a visit to 'the Hills' was only a temporary expedient, which was useless in his own case. But if he felt anxious

about himself, he was doubly anxious about Rose and Grace, who were both weak, and looked like ghosts of their former selves.

Such events are the common lot of those who serve in India. A sharp fever, overwork, constant and increasing debility, a deranged liver, or any one disorder in fact, that shows when health previously so good, and so equable in all seasons, gradually breaks down, and cannot be locally repaired—separates husbands and wives, parents and children, lovers and friends, with a terrible and distressing promptitude and certainty: and Cyril Brandon, after hearing from Mr. Mostyn and his wife, as well as from Noble and Hobson, that his friend's health was seriously giving way, was hardly surprised by a sudden summons to come and say good-bye, for they must leave Noorpoor in a few days.

And he went from his camp to visit them, and was much concerned and distressed to see what he found to be the case; for there was no question that the change was imperatively necessary. Philip Mostyn's hollow eyes and gaunt frame, were proofs of his sufferings: and he could hardly believe that such havoc could have been made in the appearance of the two ladies. It was, however, no easy matter for them all to part, who

had been so closely bound together by many ties I think, if it had been possible for Cyril to have obtained leave, he would have gone with them; but that was not possible to any but those who had to fly India for their very lives' sake—and he was well and strong; able yet to do his duty, and indeed determined to do it until he had arranged everything to the satisfaction of Government.

The last important criminal case which had been tried by the Judge, was that of Ram Das of Gokulpoor, for having incited the murder of Huree Das. I need not enter into particulars of this trial, further than to state that the evidence supplied by his account books, by the bond and memoranda found on the Dacoit's body, by the two approvers who had been released at Futtehpoor, and the evidence of several servants who had seen the approvers with their master the day before the Dacoity, and the night it occurred—proved ample for his conviction. Mr. Mostyn had sentenced him to be hanged; but this had been commuted into transportation for life to the Andaman Islands, then newly established as a penal settlement; but I question whether the miserable wretch thought the mercy extended to him was any real boon.

Cyril went to see him at his own request; and if it were any satisfaction, heard from his lips a confession of his crime, and an acknowledgment of the justice of his sentence. There were a few requests as to provision for his wife and children by Narendra, and Mr. Brandon gave his assurance that he would do what he could for them.

A few days passed, and I have no heart to write of them. In many respects they were very painful, in others hopeful to those concerned. Philip and Rose longing to see their children, and for health for all. Grace—well, hopeful too, perhaps, in her heart, though it had no utterance even to her sister. And so the last evening came, and the friends were sitting in the verandah while the ladies were preparing themselves for the night march. Philip Mostyn was giving his last directions, and he had gained Cyril's consent to inhabit the house so long as he had need of it.

'We shall meet in England, I am sure,' said Philip. 'It will not do for you to remain longer than you absolutely need after the regular furloughs are opened. I am sure too, that your mother and brother need your presence, and it will be such a comfort to them. But I will write my own impressions of your brother's health when I see him, and you must promise me—promise us

all,' he continued, as Mrs. Mostyn and Grace came out in their travelling clothes, 'not to delay here on any consideration, when a way home is open to you.'

'I do promise, promise you all, dear friends,' replied Cyril, 'as far as I can, not being at present a free agent. I do indeed yearn to see them; and after you are gone, what have I here to keep me but my work? And you can explain so much to my mother and Hylton about what has happened; much that I *could* not write, and which will come from all of you more naturally and more forcibly than from me; that I am sure I need say no more on the subject. All I would have them believe is, that I did no wrong, and that I was true; and it will be a relief to me, greater than I can tell, when I hear that you have been to Hylton. Will you all promise me to go?'

'Indeed, indeed, we will,' cried Mrs. Mostyn earnestly through her tears; 'and we will be true to you and to Seeta, as you will know hereafter; won't we Grace? and I will write, too, everything. I am sure Grace, for one, will not let me rest till I do, so you may quite trust us.'

Poor Grace could not speak then, for her tears, and many thoughts were well nigh overpowering

her. But I think, as Cyril took her to her palankeen, and bade her farewell, telling her, with a choking sob, that he could never forget her kindness and love for Seeta, and should miss her presence sadly, there was, in his lingering clasp of her hand, more comfort than she had dared to hope for.

Then, 'God bless you! good-bye! good-bye!' from all, and they were gone.

CHAPTER XVI.

'THE TENDER GRACE OF A DAY THAT IS DEAD.'

THEY had a safe passage home, and Cyril heard regularly by every mail of the great and rapid improvement of all their healths. Philip Mostyn wrote that he felt nearly as strong as ever: and as for Rose and Grace, none of their friends could believe that they had suffered from the climate, and the anxieties of the mutiny and war in India. But he gave a very poor account of Lord Hylton, with whom they had stayed a month at Hylton Hall after his return from the South of France. 'England is evidently no place for him,' wrote Mr. Mostyn by the September mail; 'and your mother and sister begin to be most anxious about him and for your return to them; but I have explained to them how impossible it is for you to get leave, except under the most emergent necessity, and that, I may safely say, has not come yet, so far as your brother is concerned; indeed, the medical opinion is, that another winter in the

South may restore him to health. I must not conceal from you, however, that he is weak, and was obliged to go home several times, during the glorious partridge shooting, in which I, old Indian as I am, fairly took my part; and he actually shivers at the thought of an English winter. So he had better go at once, and I fancy your next letters will tell you of their proposed journey southwards.

'I have had many conversations with him about Seeta. Poor fellow, he was deeply moved by all I told him about her, and your mother and sister no less so by what they were told by Rose and Grace: but they have said little to me on the subject. It was very difficult for any of us to make Seeta's character known to them as we knew it; and I think, on reflection, that you will understand this. Nothing, however, now disturbs their grateful, loving remembrance of her last act of devotion to you, which preserved you to them: and it is only their ignorance of the people, and the almost impossibility of causing them to understand what Seeta had become, and was becoming, that at present obscures their perceptions. All the memorials of your poor girl that Grace has kept, her little notes and exercises, her marks in Grace's books, and her own sketches of Seeta, have done.

more to make them think of her as you, a[illegible] all wish them to think, than anything we co[illegible] say, or you could have written: and I am sure they will come to our opinion at last. You see I have expressed myself frankly, but it was due to you that I should do so. At first, I will not say that there was not coldness, and even some aversion on your mother and sister's part to mention Seeta; but this did not last, and I rejoiced to find, before we left them, that love and admiration had gained places in their hearts, and were abiding there. For the present, therefore, you must be content that so much has been gained.

'A good deal of the feeling and prejudice that did exist may be traced, I am sure, to the impressions which late events have left upon the minds of most persons here, who know nothing of the people of India as you and I, and others know them: and who believe them, all or most, to be like the monsters who committed the massacres at Cawnpoor and elsewhere. These sad impressions will disappear in time; but at present it is almost hopeless to try to overcome them.'

If Cyril Brandon at first resented the doubts of his family on the subject of Seeta, he could not, on mature reflection, refuse to feel the weight of his friend's remarks; and in his letters to his

[redacted]er, he forbore mention of the subject further [redacted]n, by reference to those who had been her best friends. Nothing, in his case, could have been more opportune than the return of the Mostyns to England. The Judge's high position in India, the refinement and delicacy of Rose and Grace, were warrants for the respectability of Secta's position and character, which no letters from himself could have supplied; and the devotion of the last act of her life, which was now so fully made known, would, he knew, leave its fruits in the loving retention of her sweet memory. In writing to his mother, he could assure her at last, confidently, that he was fully determined on coming to her as soon as he possibly could: certainly by the close of the next year, when he would have finished the work in hand. The rest could only be fulfilled when he saw them face to face, and could tell them much that would ratify all that his dear true friends had prepared them to hear from himself. How deeply grateful Cyril felt to them, and most especially to Grace, I think I need not mention to those who, in these pages, have followed his character.

As the time passed, Cyril Brandon found what he had hoped for—a healthier spirit rising among the people. There was no further clinging to the

memories of old rulers and old systems of government. Those that had appeared on the scene, during the troubled times of Sumbut 1914, had been the cause of widespread misery and disappointment everywhere; and wherever mutiny and rebellion had existed, all enterprise had been checked, and all mutual confidence and security impaired, if not destroyed. The strange prophecy that the rule of the Koompani Bahadoor was to last only a hundred years, had, indeed, been literally fulfilled; for, on the first day of November, 1858, the gracious proclamation of Queen Victoria was issued at Allahabad, by the Governor-General, Lord Canning, and fell like oil upon troubled waters. The Company was, indeed, dead: but the Queen of England and her Government lived; and the first publication of its official existence, and determination to rule justly and mercifully, was accepted from high to low with a reverential confidence that those estimated best who watched its effects.

Meanwhile, the war was dying out; and, before the close of 1858, what remained of the rebel army had been driven across the Raptee, in Oudh, into the jungles of the Terâi of Nipál. There perished the Nana, Azim Oolla, his detestable adviser, and a host of other chieftains and rebel

officers, among whom, it was supposed, was Rajah Hurpál Singh, of whom no distinct account was ever heard. The able historian of the Sepoy War[1] is telling the details of these events with admirable vigour and perspicuity; and such scant notice of them as I could venture to give here would, I feel, be out of place, and presuming. I have no further occasion to notice the rival native powers in the Noorpoor province. Both had perished as rebels, and their possessions were justly confiscated. But while the fortifications of their castles were blown up, the Palace of Futtehpoor was preserved, and the wives of the miserable Nawab allowed to dwell in it, while they received a liberal provision from the estate for their lives, and most of the old household, who had taken no part in the rebellion, were pensioned.

Mr. Brandon had visited Shah Gunje on many occasions during his various tours, and, although his first visit after Seeta's death had been inexpressibly painful to him, and to Narendra and Aunt Ella, he had found them more resigned, perhaps, than himself, and they had entreated him not to grieve for that which had no remedy, and had been the will of God. Nor were the good

[1] Sir John Kaye, K.S.I.

priest's exhortations less impressive in their homely wisdom and earnestness.

Aunt Ella could, indeed, say little, for her mind was much turned now from the affairs and affections of the world, which, to her, were dead. 'If I could have seen a child of my darling's before I died,' she said to Cyril, 'I should have been very grateful; but that was not permitted, and my best consolation is, that she died pure in her solemn faith, and that the ceremonies for the repose of her soul are regularly performed.'

Narendra, however, was very different, and with him the priest. 'We would fain have seen her take her place among your people,' they had said, 'for she had gone out from among us to you, and by no means could the purity of her caste have been preserved.' They knew too, from Cyril, how near she had been to a final profession of the Christian faith; and what would have raised her to honour, would have been, to them, no degradation.

On one occasion of a visit, the banker had submitted to Cyril a statement of Secta's property, which was very considerable, and urged him to take possession of it, as he had an undoubted right to do; but he would receive nothing, and told Narendra and the priest of

Seeta's wish to found and endow schools in Shah Gunje for girls and boys, and a foundation for the support of poor and helpless persons. Narendra gladly accepted the alternative, as a solution of all the difficulty; and, by a proper deed, all that she could dispose of was devoted to these purposes, and invested in public securities, the income of which was to be administered by a local board of native gentlemen and merchants. Cyril himself drew the designs for the school houses, and when they should be complete, he promised to come and open them himself.

Although his brother had taken their old villa at Cannes for the winter, Lord Hylton did not write to Cyril regularly, but his mother and Augusta did, and there was an increasing tone of sadness and anxiety in their letters, as the season advanced, which foreboded no relief. A return to England for summer was very questionable, if not impossible. The last visit had done no good—indeed, positive harm—and the medical adviser had suggested Switzerland, or Arcachon, as by far preferable. There was no positive alarm in their letters, for that was slow, perhaps, to come, in the case of one so precious to all; but, as Cyril thought, if there was any good hope of that entire restoration to

strength for which all prayed, why was there not assurance of it in place of continued uneasiness about debility and loss of spirits and appetite?

Once his brother had written pleadingly: 'If it were not for your assurance that you will come to us this year, I think, dearest Cyril, I should go down fast; but that keeps me up, though I am wretchedly thin and weak, and even a short ride tires me out. Mind, I would not have it said of you, that you abandoned your work before you had completed it! that would distress me far more than that I did not see you; but Mostyn writes to me that your leave will soon be open, and, if you can, *do* get to me before Christmas. I should be very, very thankful, and so will Mater and Augusta. Where I am to go for this summer is not decided, but I think it little matters where, and I prefer Switzerland to Arcachon. I dare say we shall settle at Lausanne, and eat grapes at Montreux when they ripen. We know all about Secta now, and her memory lives with us *very* preciously. I know it will gratify you to hear how much mother and Augusta talk to me now, of all that Grace Mostyn told them: and, but for her, how little should we ever have known of the truth! We can only think, how unutterably lonely you must be without her.'

It was a hard wrench to Cyril: but by the September mail from Europe, the tidings of Lord Hylton were at last alarming. He had revived much at Lausanne; and had been able to enjoy yachting on the lake, with some English gentlemen who had formed a club there; and the gentle exercise and excitement appeared to be the very best remedies he had tried. But one day, in a severe squall and heavy sea, he had been completely drenched and chilled, and his cough, which had almost gone, had returned with great violence, accompanied by spitting of blood. They were all to proceed at once, or as soon as he could be moved, to Mentone; and the Mostyns had promised to meet them there, as a winter in the south of France had been recommended for Mr. Mostyn, who had suffered considerably from the winter he had passed in England; Lady Hylton now adjured Cyril to fulfil his promise; and the necessity of doing so admitted neither of doubt or delay. He therefore sent in his application for leave on urgent private affairs, and wrote to his mother that he had done so, and would leave India by the November mail if possible.

There was little time in which he could pay even a flying visit to all his old friends; but it must be done; and his first care was for Shah Gunje,

where Temple's tents were pitched for him in the grove near the Temple. As soon as his leave had been granted, Cyril had written to Narendra that he should come and bid him and Aunt Ella farewell; and to Temple and Baba Sahib to assemble all the principal people, that he might take leave of them. But Baba Sahib and Narendra, with Bulram Singh and others, determined it should be no empty leave taking, and they drew up an address, on rich gold-spotted paper, illuminated after a quaint and beautiful manner; and the people from towns and villages around crowded into Shah Gunje to sign it, till nearly two thousand signatures were obtained; and Narendra had a handsome silver case made for it, by one of his head workmen, and a salver, on which it was to be delivered. The school rooms were ready, too, and the scholars were entered who were to learn there, and would be presented to Cyril at the ceremony.

How much all had endured through the past terrible year, I think we know in part, yet not all: but how deeply suffering had united them to each other, ruler and ruled, that farewell ceremony proved beyond any doubt. Early after his arrival, Narendra and Baba Sahib, with a deputation of the chief people, had gone to the

tents, and requested Mr. Brandon to come to the schools at noon, when all would be ready to receive him. I do not think much was said beyond this, for the hearts of those who brought the message were too full to speak much then; and, indeed, Cyril felt as if he should be glad when the ceremony of leave taking was over. At the time appointed, he and Temple rode down to the town, and as he looked at the schools, Cyril was gratified to observe how skilfully his pretty Gothic design had been understood and executed. In a niche over the principal entrance was a tablet of white marble, with the inscription in English, Hindee, and Persian:—

'These school rooms, for the education of the boys and girls of Shah Gunje, were the gift of Seeta Bye, wife of the Honourable Cyril Brandon, Commissioner of Noorpoor. Begun 1858; finished 1859.'

The rooms, which opened into each other by folding doors, were large; but the space within was full to overflowing. Cyril could hardly bear to look around him, for there were few dry eyes in the assembly: and those of the persons who met him to conduct him to the daïs that had been constructed, were sad too; but there was little delay in the proceedings, which were opened

by Baba Sahib with a simple speech, requesting permission to read the address they had all prepared. 'I cannot trust myself to speak much,' he said, nervously, 'but I may be able, I hope, to read this, sir, though it is to bid you farewell;' and he read what had been written, often in quivering tones, and with tears dropping from his eyes, to the end. I need not, perhaps, translate the whole, but there were a few passages that I cannot withhold.

'What can we say? You were like a parent to the people: a kind and merciful parent; for in the troubled season of Sumbut 1914, you, regardless of danger to yourself, came to us when we were suffering more than we need relate now, and purged this district from rebels, Dacoits, and gang robbers, and not a trace of them remains. For this protection, and for our present security, we are deeply, very deeply, grateful to you.

'We, who are the servants of Government in this district, as also all the people, well know what your conduct to us has uniformly been: and know, also, that your kindness to us has never failed. You have taken care of us, as of your children. Were we to relate how you have exerted yourself for us, we should never make an end of it. You heard the complaints of the poor;

and, as flies to honey, all classes gathered and mingled together without apprehension in your Court: but we never heard or saw that you were impatient or used harsh expressions to anyone. Your perfect knowledge of our language assured complainants, for they knew they were understood, and were contented; and never, on any occasion, have we seen that even the meanest was treated with indignity, or affronted.

'Now you are departing from us; and we know that you would not go unless you had sore need to see your illustrious family. Be it so. Wherever you go, may God prosper you and keep you safely. Our hearts are full, and we can say no more. If you return to us, we shall be grateful to God who will send you, if not, you will not be forgotten; and from this time your name will be sung with praise as our women grind at their mills, and light their lamps.

'Now our last request is this: that as you have bestowed so many obligations and so much love upon us, we, to show our gratitude to you, have signed this humble address, which indeed is unworthy to present to you, save as an expression of our affection and devotion; and we pray that you may be pleased to accept it from us, and to keep us in your remembrance always.'

Cyril tried to reply; and as his old friend stood wiping his eyes, and sobbing like a child, said as much as he found words to utter. All his remembrances of Shah Gunje and his love for Seeta, rushed upon him so vividly, and so distressingly, that it was difficult to arrange words in his mind to assure those who heard him of what he felt; but they seemed to understand intuitively what he was thinking of, as he mentioned the last gift of one whom he had loved and honoured as his wife, and in whose name the schools they had used that day, for the first time, had been erected and endowed. Then he thanked them for their love to him, and their obedience and loyalty, and told them that if God willed, he would return to them again.

It was poor comfort perhaps, and they believed he would return if he could; but nothing could repress the passionate outburst of grief which ensued as he ceased speaking, and said 'Farewell,' asking them not to forget him.

'We will not forget you,' cried hundreds: 'never! never!' and as he descended from the dais, the people crowded about him, kissing his hands, his feet, his clothes, or reaching forward their hands that they might touch him: and so

they followed him to Narendra's house, and left him there.

There was not much to say perhaps, and the old banker was too much affected to speak more than a few words. His adopted son was present, and Cyril felt that he had chosen well in the fine intelligent young man who was introduced to him, and who bent before him while he put his hands on his head. At last Narendra said, 'Leave us, Mr. Brandon, for this parting is too bitter and painful for us all to be long maintained. Write to me of your welfare, and I will write to you myself, as long as God spares me. We have one memory in common which can never fade, and for all your love to her, and your confidence in me, I am most grateful. I hope to hear soon of your marriage, sir, for you ought not to remain as you are; and if you should choose Mr. Mostyn's sister, I shall be happy to think that you have as your wife one who so loved our darling. For the rest, I will take care of all your people. Bukdeo and his brother will belong to my guard, and had better stay with me now. Your Sikhs are well provided for already. Now come and see Aunt Ella, but indeed she will hardly be able to speak, and you will forgive her. But take my blessing, Mr. Brandon; once more,

and for the last time, I think, I commit you to His care before whom there are no distinctions.'

Poor Aunt Ella! she clung to Cyril sobbing and gasping hysterically, but could not speak, though she tried hard to do so: and it was merciful, perhaps, that she seemed to swoon away, and then Cyril left her to the care of her women. After that came the farewell to the good old priest, Wamun Bhut, and to many friends who had assembled in the court yard. All that Cyril took away with him was Seeta's old 'tumboora,' which, as he went once more to the upper room, he saw standing in the corner where he had first seen it, and when she sang to him the sad old Hindee ballad we know of.

'This day's work will be a lesson to me, Brandon, that I shall never forget,' said Temple, as they sat alone after all were gone away. 'Would that I possessed the love of the people as you do!'

'It is easily and simply gained,' replied Cyril. 'Be just, be patient, be firm and true: be always accessible and courteous, never forgetting your position, and they will love you. They are almost like children, you see, easily led, when once they have given their faith.'

In the morning ere the day broke they had

parted, for Cyril had to hasten back to Noorpoor. He could not see the oriel window so dear to him, but a lamp was burning in the room which seemed to twinkle like a bright star.

There was a similar ceremony awaiting him at Noorpoor. Equally moving and equally grateful to him were the words of the address, but I do not think I need to repeat the details. Then came farewell dinners at the messes, and a public dinner at the Brigadier's, with speeches in his honour at all, and hearty wishes for his safe journey home and speedy return. Perhaps Captain Hobson would have gone with Cyril; but he was then raising a new regiment, and he was thinking, too, what a pretty and comfortable wife Lucy Home would make him, while, to all appearance, her opinion of him, as a possible husband, was in exact consonance.

After all, had Cyril Brandon been as popular among his own people as he was among those he had ruled? Perhaps not. Certainly not as popular as Mr. Mostyn, and there were reasons which strike me for this, which I will not withhold. Philip Mostyn was always present, and his genial nature could not be resisted; Cyril Brandon was for the most part absent in his district, and who knew or cared what he did there? As a keen

sportsman he was popular with the youngsters who went to his camp on hunting parties, but they did not constitute society. Of the rest, many, perhaps most, sneered at Cyril's care, nay affection, for the people he ruled over. They professed not to be able to understand how an English gentleman could so much identify himself with 'the natives,' how in fact he could bear with them at all, much less make friends of them. And perhaps it is too often the case, that entire unsympathy causes such characters as Cyril Brandon's to be almost universally misunderstood, and perhaps often misrepresented. They have, however, their reward, as Cyril Brandon had, who did not hesitate between the affection of his people, and the opinions of the ever fluctuating and varying society of the station, carrying away grateful remembrance of the love and gratitude of the one for his life, while the other faded altogether out of his memory.

The last day came; and very early in the morning Cyril walked down the Judge's garden to his own, and past the ruins of his house and Seeta's cottage to the shore of the lake under the water gate, where a little altar to Seeta's memory had been erected. There was no inscription on it but the word 'Seeta' in English and

Hindee letters, and the date of her death. Out of the top grew a plant of the sweet basil or toolsee, which was still carefully watered and tended by the old Brahmin and his wife, who, on the part of Narendra, performed the necessary ceremonies, and lighted a lamp in a niche of the altar every evening. The lamp had gone out, for the night was past; and as Cyril sat down near the little memorial the sun rose, and flashed upon the quiet lake, the tower, and the grim old fort above, in a rich golden glory. There were many, many sweet memories rushing into Cyril's heart, of one gone to her rest, which were not put back, as he prayed for help and direction in his future life. He might return, but he felt an almost consciousness that he should not; and as he looked around for the last time, he stepped forward and broke off a branch from the plant, which was to be treasured safely. Then he went up to the octagon room in the tower, but there was nothing there now but the flowers which Seeta had planted near the entrance, and of which he gathered a few blossoms. The pet birds had been long ago sent to Shah Gunje, and were safe. So he took leave of all that would never be forgotten. Never!

* * * * * *

'I am only a competition-walla,' said Noble,

as he bid Cyril good-bye in the evening, 'and I admit I have had my conceits and strong prejudices; but I am pretty well cured of them, Brandon, and I have grown to be of your opinion as to the people whom I used to sneer at: and though I can never attain your popularity or the love they bear you, yet I, too, will try to follow your example, and you need be under no apprehension that all you have done and projected, will fail in my hands. Yes, you have been right all through: and I hope you will forgive the petulance with which I used to speak of the people as "niggers," and think, as by Jove I used to think, that the only way to manage them was not certainly to gain their affections. I often think how patient you have been with me, and indeed, Brandon, I will not fail now.'

'And you will succeed, too,' replied Cyril. 'I, for one, have faith in anyone who has faith in himself, and I leave everything in your hands with perfect confidence. If I can help you in any matter you have only to write, and I hope you will write in any case. Now, good-bye! Come, Muff, we must go!'

'Good-bye, and God bless you, Brandon,' said Mr. Noble. Cynic as he was, tears rose to his

eyes as he turned away when Cyril's palankeen disappeared out of the gate, attended by some sorrowing servants, who followed their kind and generous master till he had passed beyond the boundaries of the cantonment.

CHAPTER XVII.

'CLOSING SCENES.'

I KNOW few more lovely spots on earth than Mentone, soft and grand by turns; a rare combination of mountain, wood, and sea—ever varying in tint and expression, in light and shadow, and in the aerial effects of its soft, sweet, dreamy climate. It was nearly Christmas, yet gardens were gay with flowers; the air was laden with the perfume of orange and lemon blossoms, of roses, of violets, and tuberoses, and was as soft and warm as a mild English spring. Those who live there have their prejudices as to situation, and there are as strong advocates for the west bay as for the east; but to me the latter is the most lovely. The Monarch 'Berceau,' with its naked limestone precipices, rising out of the grey olive woods, and its broken ridges declining till they end in the glowing 'Rocher Rouge,' which forms the eastern horn of the bay. The picturesque old town hanging to the rock on which it is built, and the rows

of hotels, pensions, and villas, bright and cheerful, backed by dense olive woods, are reflected in the blue sea: and, above all, the grand masses of the rocks of St. Agnese, and the high sharp peak of the 'Gran' Mondo'—at this season capped with snow—form pictures of ever varying and transcendent beauty, perhaps above all other localities of the Riviera.

Near a window in a villa, on the very skirts of the olive woods, situated above the line of hotels, and so as completely to overlook them and command an unbroken view of the bay, the town, and the ranges of mountains, up to Monaco, lay Lord Hylton, now weak almost unto death. The bright sun is shining into the room, and the air is deliciously soft and balmy as it comes through the partly opened casement: yet the dear invalid is closely wrapped in blankets, and he seems to shiver as he draws his hand across his face.

'Are you cold, dear?' asks his mother anxiously, who has been sitting near him reading. 'Shall I shut the window?'

'No, mother,' he replied; 'I was not cold. I was only thinking—thinking whether I should last till Cyril comes. I feel so weak, to-day—so weak, mother!'

Lady Hylton turned away her head to hide her

tears: Ah! he was weak indeed, and there was no hope now. Last year there had been a rally, and, when they arrived from Lausanne, Lord Hylton had revived again for awhile; but worse symptoms had set in, and kind Dr. B—— had warned them all that the end was now inevitable, and was only a question of time.

'He will come, darling,' she replied. 'Do not fear. This is his mail, and there are letters from us waiting at Marseilles, directing him what to do; but he cannot possibly arrive for three days yet, so you must be patient!'

'I will, mother,' he said, with a resigned sigh. 'But O, I yearn for him, more than I can tell, except to God; and there are so many uncertainties, too. Even at the last they may have said to him in Calcutta, "You are of too much use, we cannot spare you." Indeed, I can't help thinking of all these contingencies, and then he seems to fade out of sight altogether.'

'But you must not think of them, my pet; you must believe he is to come, as he will come, I am certain; why, Mr. Mostyn said, only this morning, that he had seen his leave in orders by the last Gazette, and that Cyril's hurried letter from Benares ought to satisfy you.'

'I will try, mother,' he said, more cheerfully

'And now read on; I was dozing when you read last, and you must go back a page or two.'

It was very quiet and peaceful everywhere; a few flies were buzzing about the window pane; without there was a slight, very slight, rustle or sigh of the woods; the tall cypresses before the house waved very gently, and the low murmur of waves lapping the shore, came up soothingly. The bay was blue and bright, and the old brown city seemed to be asleep in the sunlight, while above it were the faint blue distances of the land and the ocean. Lady Hylton was reading softly, and the only sounds that broke the silence were the grand and loving words of a portion of Jeremy Taylor's 'Holy Living and Dying,' which was Lord Hylton's favourite book now.

'He will come from the sea, there,' said Lord Hylton, in a dreamy whisper, as if to himself, as he pointed in the direction of Monaco; and as he turned, apparently to watch, he fell unconsciously into a soft sleep, like a child's, while his mother sat by him.

'Ah! thank God for this,' said his mother; 'he will be better when he wakes.' As she rose softly to close the window, she looked out for a moment, and saw a tall bronzed man, with a large beard, and a little grey Skye terrier

running before him, walking up a path from the road below. She could not see the features, and said to herself, 'Some tourist, perhaps, but I hope he won't come here for the view, for Hylton must not be disturbed.' And she was sitting down again, when a strong footstep was heard on the gravel without, and a tall figure passed the window rapidly; Lord Hylton started from his sleep, and, as the man crossed another window, stretched out his arms and cried, 'Cyril! O, Cyril, come to me!'

He was right. Another moment, and Cyril, who had entered by the open hall, as he had caught a glimpse of his mother's face at the open window, crossed the drawing-room with his strong firm step, and, while his mother clung to him, in a burst of tears, he knelt down by his brother and threw his stout arms about him in a gentle, loving embrace.

Lord Hylton could not speak, but his thin white hands were caressing his brother's bronzed face, passing through his thick curly beard, running through his hair, while his tears were falling silently and rapturously on the strong brown hands. What a contrast there was, between the brothers! one full of health, energy, and vital power; the other so wasted, so feeble, and yet

his cheeks and eyes flashing with unwonted brilliance. 'Cyril! Cyril!' was all he could say, as again and again he leaned his head on that broad breast. 'Mother, I do thank God that I have seen him.'

Then Augusta came in, who had been on an errand in the town, and threw her arms round Cyril, who still knelt by his brother's sofa. 'And you passed me in the street, you bad boy,' she said, 'and would not even look at me, though I stared ever so hard. I was sure it was he, mother, though I dare not speak to him. And are you Muff?' she continued to the little fellow who was humbly trying to attract notice by sitting up and begging. 'Come, you are a pet, indeed!' and Muff jumped into her lap, and kissed her after his own doggish fashion. And so they sat, while Lord Hylton listened to Cyril's account of his voyage; but he could not speak much, for the excitement had brought on his terrible cough, and Cyril saw, only too surely, that there was no hope of life.

Augusta had written a hurried line to Mrs. Mostyn, 'Would they come to dinner, for Cyril had arrived, and they were like themselves, to him?' The Mostyns had rooms in the great pension below, and, in truth, Grace, who had

been sitting at the window, had seen Cyril and Muff pass up to the villa, and had run to tell her sister. They were not likely to stand on ceremony, and they came up and joined the party gladly. How much had they all to say! while the poor invalid sat up, and listened with a quiet, smiling, thankful face, more like his own, they all thought, than they had seen for a long time past.

So days and weeks passed, happily, though the dark shadow was hanging over one of them, plain to see by all. For a long time—for several weeks, indeed—Cyril's presence had seemed to give his brother new vigour; and Cyril's tales of his Indian life, of the period of the mutiny, and of the official work, had a charm of novelty and freshness in which he revelled. Nor was Seeta omitted; but I think she was mentioned with some reticence by all. The joy they felt on having Cyril among them seemed, for the time, to have dimmed the recollection that, but for her devotion, they had never seen him. This, however, was only at first; and presently, to Cyril's great relief and joy, they came to speaking of her as she deserved, and as he and the Mostyns had best hoped. Then there were pleasant excursions to Gorbio, to St. Agnese, to Sospello, and Bordighera,

all within the day, for they dare not leave Lord Hylton long; and one evening he asked them to sing to him, as, indeed, Grace and Mrs. Mostyn had been in the habit of doing, for he loved to hear their rich voices blending together in sweet harmonies. They had been taking new lessons while they were in London, and their performance was well nigh perfect now.

One evening Cyril went to his room, and brought the old copy of the duett we remember, with the last sad night on which it had been so fearfully interrupted. Grace had not asked for it, and flushed to her clear bright forehead, as he unrolled the yellow smoke-stained music, and spread it before her on the piano. I will not say that he had not pain in the effort he had made: but he had overcome it, for she was very dear now, and he thought she looked grateful, as she took up the old worn copy and looked over it. 'Dimmi che m' ami, ancor.' Their voices were trembling, and Rose's accompaniment was far from steady; but Lord Hylton listened with a delight he could not conceal. 'Sing it again,' he said; 'I like it best of any you two have sung to me.' And they did so, more steadily, perhaps, now the ice was broken.

Yes, it was the old, old story once more. Why

should I conceal it? Told to each other one evening, among the grand old olive trees behind the villa, mutually believed with not a doubt or fear, and with only poor, happy Muff as a witness. How beautiful Grace was now! more womanly, more perfect in form, more graceful, und yet with none of her charming, gentle, gracious manner disturbed or altered. Lord Hylton had been urgent with his brother for a long time to declare himself to her, for he had early seen that there was no real impediment; and as to Augusta, she had wormed out Grace's secret long ago, and teazed her brother—not by telling it, indeed, but by urging him to give her to her as a sister. Lady Hylton was, perhaps, not so enthusiastic at first; Cyril, she thought, though she did not say it, ought to see more of English society than Mentone afforded, and take his choice more deliberately. And yet, after all, whom did she know like that sweet, tender Grace Mostyn, so fitted to adorn any station in life? And thus the dear old lady took Grace to her heart, and loved her as a daughter.

Most likely they would have waited, as Grace desired, till their return to England; but Lord Hylton was now becoming nervous and impatient that the marriage should take place in his presence,

while he had strength to witness it; and that time was now fast drawing to a close, for Dr. B—— had warned them all, and not less his patient, that all worldly matters should be set at rest, for that the final parting was very near. 'It must be, and that soon, dear Cyril,' Hylton had said, after one of the kind doctor's visits. 'He has been telling me that all earthly things should be settled, so that I can look up to God without a thought save of his mercy. And indeed, Cyril, to know—to feel that you and dear Grace were happy, would be the crowning joy of my poor life. As you did not refuse my prayer to come home to me, so you must not deny me this last great satisfaction and blessing. Since you came, I seem to have lived years with you in unreserved confidence, and I know and respect all your thoughts; but this is one of my last requests.'

Could Cyril refuse such an appeal, backed as it was by his mother and sister, and Rose, whose dearest wish, long, long ago entertained, was now to be fulfilled? It was quite impossible; and Grace, too, yielded to the general combination against her. So, one day, Lord Hylton was carried in a hammock down to the little church by the sea, placed in an easy chair by the altar, and was able to follow the ceremony which united them with a

grateful, satisfied heart. It was a quiet affair, altogether; Augusta and three mutual friends were bridesmaids, and Charles Graham, a fine young fellow, to whom Augusta was engaged, acted as best man to Cyril. Even the poor invalid was cheerful and joyous in his quiet way, and at the *déjeûner*, after the ceremony, raised himself, and said a few grateful words, while he drank to the health of those most dear to him. Lord Hylton was happy now; happy and content that in this, his last act in life, he had done his duty.

They went away on a short excursion for a fortnight along the quiet towns of the Riviera; and when they returned, Cyril was shocked to find so much alteration in his brother. It was only what he had been told to look for, but when the reality came, it was inexpressibly painful. Lord Hylton had no desire to live, his two last wishes had been mercifully accomplished, and his release from weakness, which had become constant pain, would be welcome. And one evening, towards the close of April, the pure humble spirit passed gently away. Reclining by the window, in the place where he had first seen Cyril, he had been looking with dreamy eyes over the sea and town, and had murmured something which Cyril could

not hear; but an old thought had come back, and pointing to the sea he had said, 'There, there. Thank God!' And Cyril had raised him a little, and put his head on his own breast. Once or twice Lord Hylton looked up gratefully and smiled, as he pressed the hand he held: then there was a slight shiver, and a sigh, and he was gone!

They laid him to rest in the little quiet cemetery, which is shaded by trees above the town, and where all the last offices were fulfilled. There was no need to remain at Mentone, and they separated for a time. Lady Hylton and Augusta went direct to England under the charge of Charles Graham, and the Mostyns travelled with them; while Cyril, now Lord Hylton, took his wife to Italy, and returning home by Germany, met them all again at the grand old home of his ancestors, Hylton Hall.

I need not dilate upon his new life. We know what he was in India, and though England does not bring him into that close, and, if I may say it, fatherly connection with the people and their interests that his Indian office did, yet he finds much to do. He is very hospitable, an active magistrate, and a thorough sportsman, which are acceptable qualities in his county, and the com-

pliment of his appointment as Deputy-Lieutenant in his brother's place, was at once paid to him. When he took his seat in the House of Lords, his eminent services in India were mentioned warmly, and he continues to be looked up to as an authority in Indian questions in which he has few rivals there. On these questions he speaks fluently and persuasively, and not without a certain weight and authority which his experience has given him. Perhaps, when he has had more experience of English politics, he may become an English statesman, but that is yet to come. It was gratifying to him to receive the order of the Star of India, and a high pleasure to know, that in the same grade, had been included the name of his old faithful friend and constant companion, Baba Sahib. When his furlough had expired, Lord Hylton was obliged to resign the service to which he had belonged; but to do so was a hard wrench, the pain of which has not, I know, passed away, nor indeed will ever completely leave him; and it would not surprise me to hear that some day he took Grace back to India for a cold weather tour, and paid a last visit to the people in whom he trusted, and with whom he so lovingly parted.

If you, gentle reader, wish to know his views

of Indian policy, I must request you to read Her Gracious Majesty's proclamation in 1858, in which he is a true believer. He sees what has been done for the advancement of the people in education, and, indeed, in every other respect, and watches carefully what is doing. He has, however, one anxiety which he trusts will pass away: that the doctrines of the Manchester school may lead to greater local expenditure than the true public interests warrant, and that a too profuse expenditure may lead to additional burthens on the people which would be resented, and endanger the popularity of the Government. He would therefore prefer that the public expenditure should be strictly kept within the income, now so largely increased and increasing, so as to leave a surplus in every year for any possible and unforeseen contingency.

Lord Hylton (may I still call him Cyril?) hears constantly from his old friends, and the news of his marriage gave much and genuine delight. Narendra, who gave a great feast in honour of it, has insisted upon sending Grace a magnificent waistbelt or zone of the purest gold, made in almost invisible joints, with a richly chased clasp, almost too heavy for her to wear. Aunt Ella has sent her a valuable cashmere shawl and a neck

lace of pearls which her husband thinks were Seeta's; and every six months or so comes a box full of pickles, curry paste, the dear Aunt's famous vermicelli, and 'Pápurs,' with other condiments. Both still enjoy a green old age, and are very happy, for Aunt Ella is less ascetic, and more natural now. Narendra's adoption has satisfied every one, even Aunt Ella, and the business is greater than ever; and Temple knows, for he is a trustee, though Lord Hylton does not, that the 'grand old man,' as Temple calls him, has invested five thousand pounds in the names of each of the three children that have been born, and should more follow, they will, he thinks, be equally well provided for. 'I never shall forget his honour in regard to Seeta,' he said to Temple; 'and all I am worth could not repay his tender love for her and for us.'

Grace's, Lady Hylton's, character has been much developed by her position, and her beauty still fascinates all who see it. In her sphere she is ever truly the lady—bountiful, kind, gentle, hospitable, and truly benevolent. Perhaps there is a certain reticence about her which she has never lost, and that she does not wish to be known to all with whom she is necessarily thrown in contact; but to those whom she does know, she

is the most charming of their friends. Sometimes old Lady Hylton stays with her son, sometimes with Augusta, whose husband is a magnate in Scotland, and I am bound to say that dear Grandmamma is most popular among her grandchildren.

The Mostyns paid a last, long visit to Hylton Hall, and Philip heartily enjoyed shooting with his old friend. Soon afterwards they returned to India, but not to Noorpoor; for Mr. Mostyn has obtained one of the very highest judicial stations: and they are looking forward with hope to a speedy and final return home.

* * * * * * *

And is Seeta forgotten? Not so. Come, I will show you a picture. Look well on it, and if you can realise the group in your mind, it is one that is, I think, both touching and beautiful!

There is a room which is known at Hylton Hall as my Lord's study; but which Cyril calls his 'den,' hung round with Indian trophies of the chase, and Indian arms and hog spears, the addresses in their silver cases, and many sketches, and finished drawings of Indian landscapes and figures. Now, as I gently open the door, we see that two figures are standing before the fireplace, looking up to a picture which hangs on the wall

above them. It is a large, masterly drawing in water colour, of a fair Indian lady, simply dressed in white muslin drapery. Below its rich frame is another oval frame made like a large locket, and lined with crimson velvet, in which are a long tress of wavy, deep brown hair, almost black, but which, where the light falls, shows a tinge of bright gold. With it, there is a small withered branch of a sweet-scented Indian plant, and some dried flowers tied up with ribbon, of which we know.

Those who are looking at these objects are Grace, Lady Hylton, whose beauty is great, but not greater than that of the picture, though of a very different character. The tall strong figure beside her, with the brown curly beard and handsome manly features, is her husband, and a pretty child, a girl of three years old, with a profusion of curly golden hair, is clinging to her mother's skirts, while an old grey skye terrier, now infirm, licks her hand, and she cries, 'Mc look, Mamma! Rosey look!' till she is taken up. Then her mother opens the case, and smiling, though her eyes glisten with tears, turns to her husband and says, 'The leaves are sweet still, Cyril, as sweet as ever.'

'Yes, darling,' he replies, 'as sweet as her memory is to us both.' And he draws her to his heart close—closer—while she rests her head on

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